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AUTHOR	Krusekopf, Frances; Karr-Kidwell, P.J.
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ABSTRACT

This study was designed as a field research project aimed at improving the method of assessing student learning at ACT Academy in the McKinney Independent School District, McKinney, Texas. Data and information were gathered and analyzed to see how the administration could improve the current student portfolio process. Reflections were completed by parents of ACT Academy students. Although not every parent answered every question, responses were received from 62 parents of elementary school students, 21 parents of middle school students, 15 parents of high school students. Sixteen facilitators from the teaching staff also completed surveys about the portfolio process. Results of parent reflections and teacher surveys revealed that both parents and teachers at ACT Academy thought that the portfolio process was a valid form of assessment. There was a strong indication from parents that growth and learning could be identified. Responses by teachers suggested that there was interest in improving the portfolio process through dialogue and training. Experiences with the portfolio approach have demonstrated that portfolio assessment can be an effective tool to evaluate student growth, and findings of the study indicate that the refinement of the portfolio process would be a worthwhile endeavor. Ten appendixes contain supplemental information and illustrative figures. (Contains 44 figures and 34 references.) (SLD)

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MAXIMIZING THE IMPACT OF PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Frances Krusekopf
McKinney I.S.D.
Middle School Mathematics Teacher
Master's Student, Texas Woman's University

PJ Karr-Kidwell, Ph.D.
Professor, Educational Administration
College of Professional Education
Texas Woman's University

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Introduction

Effective school administrators take on a variety of roles within a school. About two decades ago, the literature on successful principals began to focus primarily on the instructional leadership role of an administrator (De Bevoise, 1984; Stronge, 1993). The findings of recent studies have indeed confirmed the significant relationship between principals who display instructional leadership and the success of a school (Hackett, 1992; Hanson, 2001; Nikolay, 2001; Quinn, 1999; Thomas-Hodge, 1994). Initially, instructional leaders were defined as principals who actively promoted the improvement of student learning (De Bevoise, 1984).

Review of Related Literature

Superintendent Richard DuFour (2002) recently refined the definition of instructional leadership by suggesting that principals need to think of themselves as "learning leaders" (p. 13). Rather than directly leading themselves, DuFour (2002) argues that learning leaders should help facilitate the creation of teacher teams. Improving student learning often necessitates change, and as an instructional leader, the principal is the key instigator of change (Snowden & Gorton, 2002). One significant method of improving student learning that has been explored over the last decade is alternative assessment.

Alternative assessment methods were developed in an effort to determine a more appropriate means of assessing the abilities of the whole child (Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999; Morrill, 2003; Neill, 2003; Popham, 2003; Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999). According to Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, an individual's intelligence can be measured in a variety of ways. Therefore, just as teachers cannot depend on using similar

methods to teach all learners, they also need to consider that the same assessment is not appropriate for all learners (Cole, Ryan, Kick, & Mathies, 2000; Jorgensen, 1993). Alternative assessment emphasizes the importance of differentiated assessment as opposed to traditional assessment, which relies predominantly on using tests and essays as a means of assessing what a student knows (Butts, 1997). However, tests are limited in that they are unable to show various aspects of what a student has learned (Butts, 1997; Cole et al., 2000), and they are focused on an individual's knowledge at a given moment in time (Benson & Barnett, 1999; Cole et al., 2000). By providing students with opportunities to demonstrate their learning in an authentic context, authentic assessment, often described as performance-based assessment, makes learning more relevant to students who can demonstrate knowledge and understanding through real world experiences (Butts, 1997; Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999; Hebert, 2001; Morrill, 2003). These experiences might include performance-based tests, observations, open-ended questions, projects, interviews, and portfolios (Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999).

Portfolios are a collection of work used to assess learning. They are distinct from folders of work that might be gathered by a parent in that portfolios are organized and have a given purpose (Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999; Seidel et al., 1997). There are varied opinions on what should be included in a portfolio; however, the collection of work should demonstrate what a student has learned and understood over a given period of time and thereby offer a means by which to assess individual learning (Seidel et al., 1997). Pearl Paulson and Leon Paulson (1994) suggest that because portfolios are used to tell a story, one should place anything in the portfolio that assists in telling that story. By contrast, Cole et al. (2000) maintain that a portfolio must include a specific set of documents, including student-selected work, student reflections, a

purpose, formative and summative samples, and growth samples. Other research has revealed that a minimum of ten tasks are required to assess a student in a given subject area adequately (Sweet, 1993). School principal, Elizabeth Hebert (2001), emphasizes that there is no one, right portfolio but that portfolio development is influenced by the content, purpose, and ownership of the portfolio.

The benefits of using this portfolio assessment can be realized by students, teachers, and parents. Researchers have found that children are capable of deriving meaning from their learning through the process of organizing and sharing their portfolios (Benson & Barnett, 1999; Cole et al., 2000; Hebert, 2001; Herman, Klein, & Wakai, 1997; Paulson & Paulson, 1994). The use of self-reflection, where students develop "metacognition" by thinking and writing about the contents of their portfolios, particularly encourages self-growth and a deeper understanding of themselves as learners (Cole et al., 2000; Hebert, 2001). Involving learners in the process of assessing themselves provides motivation to continue to learn both within and beyond classrooms (Benson & Barnett, 1999; Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999; Herman et al., 1997). Moreover, it places emphasis on the process of learning and assessment over time rather than on products such as a test or letter grade that occur at a given moment in time (Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999; Macewan, 1996). In addition to motivation, the portfolio process gives children a sense of ownership and responsibility over their learning (Benson & Barnett, 1999; Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999; Hebert, 2001; Paulson, 1993). Finally, portfolios are an invaluable process for special education students who often cannot be effectively assessed using traditional assessments (Fu & Lamme, 2002; Hebert, 2001; Kleinert, Green, Hurte, Clayton, & Oetinger, 2002).

Teachers also have much to gain from the use of portfolios in their classrooms. Teachers are able to gain a broader understanding of a student's progress and learning process by looking at a large sample of the student's work (Campbell, 1997; Koertz, Stecher, & Deibert, 1992; Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999). Insights into a child's specific learning experience and needs can be gained from reading the reflections that students write to accompany their collection of work (Benson & Barnett, 1999; Locatelli, 1998; Seidel et al., 1997; Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999). The understandings that teachers develop inform their future instructional strategies and curriculum (Fu & Lamme, 2002). Finally, the opportunity to observe a student explain his or her learning to his or her parents at a portfolio conference can be a rewarding and reaffirming experience for a teacher who may or may not have realized how much his or her students learned (Benson & Barnett, 1999).

Parents are a key component to the portfolio process because along with the teacher, they constitute the audience for which the portfolio is prepared. Student-led conferencing has been determined to be an effective means of promoting parent involvement in schools (Benson & Barnett, 1999; Cole et al., 2000; Weldin & Tuamrkin, 1998/1999). Portfolios give parents a more comprehensive understanding of their child's progress and learning issues than the information conveyed in a traditional report card (Paulson & Paulson, 1994; Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999). Thus, they provide a means of helping parents understand the multiplicity of the evaluation process (Cole et al., 2000) as well as an opportunity to contribute their input to this process (Fu & Lamme, 2002).

The benefits of using portfolio assessment may be apparent; however, the successful implementation of portfolios within schools requires support and training. In order to be

successfully implemented, the transition away from traditional assessments to alternative assessments should be done gradually (Paulson & Paulson, 1994). The experience of implementing portfolios nationwide in the United Kingdom, the pioneers of performance assessment, provided the U.S. with a valuable model highlighting the time and challenges that face those attempting assessment reform of this kind (Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, & Student Testing [CRESST], 1992). Jorgensen (1993) maintains that restructuring assessment strategies involves a variety of "paradigm shifts" that rely on devoting an extensive amount of time to conversations about the topic. A commitment from the administration and staff to participate in continuous staff development related to portfolio assessment is a key factor in ensuring the success of portfolio implementation (Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999). Research carried out in Vermont, the first U.S. state to adopt portfolios as part of their statewide assessment system, and Michigan, revealed the importance of gaining teacher support by including teachers in the creation and implementation of assessment reform (Dietel, 1992).

Administrators need to provide a positive school climate where teachers feel they can take risks and make mistakes while becoming comfortable with the alternative assessment process (Jorgensen, 1993). Experience has shown that parents, district administrators, including the superintendent, and school committee members need to be invited into classrooms so that their support for alternative assessment can be fostered (Seidel et al., 1997). In addition, teachers and administrators networking with other schools and districts utilizing alternative assessments should be endorsed (Seidel et al., 1997). Administrative support is further needed to assist teachers in educating parents about the portfolio process (Cole et al., 2000).

Parent training is a necessity to bring about the successful implementation of portfolio assessment (Cole et al., 2000; Hebert, 1998; Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999). Parents need to be explicitly taught the significance of the portfolio process (Hebert, 1998) to help them learn about the method and purpose of this means of alternative assessment (Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999). An effective and proven means of conveying information about this process to parents is to hold informational and questioning sessions prior to initial portfolio conferences and throughout the school year (Hebert, 1998; Paulson & Paulson, 1994; Seidel et al., 1997; Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999). Additional methods of reaching a wider audience of parents includes loaning out videotapes of parent meetings (Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999); creating parent teams; publishing newsletters; and distributing information via e-mail, fax, and the Internet (Cole et al., 2000). When successfully implemented, it is clear that portfolio assessment benefits all stakeholders involved in the education of a learner including the child, parent, teacher, and administrator.

Statement of the Problem

The move toward high-stakes assessment in U.S. schools has reinforced the value of alternative assessment among many educators (Cole et al., 2000; Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999; Fu & Lamme, 2002; Hebert, 2001; Neill, 2003; Paulson, 1993). Advocates of alternative assessment argue that a child's learning cannot only be assessed through one tool such as a standardized test (Cole et al., 2000; Fu & Lamme, 2002; Hebert, 2001). Alternative assessment methods are believed to be a more appropriate means of assessing the abilities of the whole child and understanding how a child learns (Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999; Hebert, 2001; Weldin &

Tumarkin, 1998/1999). An important component of alternative assessment is portfolio-based assessment. In order for the portfolio process to be considered a viable alternative or supplement to high-stakes assessment, it needs to be implemented successfully. Successful implementation relies on administrative support and teacher and parent training.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this paper was to create a field research project aimed at improving the method of assessing student learning at ACT Academy in McKinney ISD. Data and information were gathered and analyzed to determine how the administration can improve the current portfolio process. Teacher and parent training materials and opportunities will be developed as a result of the findings.

Procedures

The aim of this field research project was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the portfolio assessment process at ACT Academy. This study used both existing and new data to assess the strengths and weaknesses of this process. Prior to this study, the existing data had been collected, but had never been analyzed to determine trends among the responses.

This study was developed to review parent reflections completed for the campus administrator during the October, 2002 portfolio conferences (See Appendix A). ACT Academy parents, with children in the elementary (K-5), middle (6-8), and high (9-12) schools, completed a total of approximately 100 reflections. All parents were encouraged to complete a reflection as part of the portfolio conference experience, yet the reflections did not represent the opinions of

all ACT Academy parents, as some parents did not complete a form. The parent reflection data was analyzed to determine trends in the concerns and comments made by those who responded.

This study also included parent reflections completed for individual teachers and the campus administrator during the 2001/2002 portfolio conferences (See Appendix B). Approximately 180 parent reflections completed by ACT parents with children in the elementary and middle schools, during one of four portfolio conference sessions held during the 2001/2002 school year, were reviewed. Once again, parent reflections were completed on a voluntary basis, and the data was an incomplete representation of the opinions of all parents with children at the school due to an inability to locate many of the completed parent reflections. These parent reflections were analyzed by reviewing the responses given to two Likert-type scale questions and by compiling suggestions made by parents in response to the open-ended questions.

Parent reflections have been an aspect of the portfolio process in recent years; however, similar feedback has not been requested from ACT Academy teachers. Therefore a new survey was designed to gather information from the teachers, also referred to as facilitators, at ACT Academy (See Appendix C). One of the goals of the survey was to determine the level of portfolio assessment understanding and training that currently exists among teachers at ACT Academy. The survey also included open-ended questions to identify the amount of time teachers currently devote to the portfolio assessment process, the need for teacher interaction at portfolio conferences, and the future training needs of teachers. Almost all teachers (N = 16) who participated directly in the portfolio process at ACT Academy completed this survey in November, 2002.

After gathering and analyzing all parent reflections and teacher surveys, the results were compiled. These results were used to develop guidelines for the types of training materials and opportunities that are needed to improve the ACT Academy portfolio process.

Results

The results of the October, 2002 parent reflections were analyzed by elementary, middle and high schools, as it was felt that parents with children of different ages represented different expectations and needs at a portfolio conference. The questions posed on this parent reflection form were open-ended, and in order to analyze the data, common responses were paraphrased to cluster the data. The most popular responses were utilized. Additional items can be examined on the graphs located in the appendices.

The elementary school results included 62 completed parent reflections representing 51.67% of the total elementary school student enrollment. Parents did not always respond to all questions on the reflection, and therefore there were not always 62 responses to each of the questions asked. When asked whether the portfolio process was a good representation of their child's learning 66.12% answered yes, 4.84% answered no, 20.97% answered somewhat, 4.84% were undecided and 3.23% did not respond. There were a total of 45 responses given to the question, "Does this method work your family?" Of these responses, 42.22% were positive while 57.78% were negative. Among the positive responses, the two most common reasons were that the portfolio was a good representation of their child's learning (36.85%) and that the portfolio allowed them to see more than on a report card (31.59%). Among the negative responses, the two most common reasons were that direct input was needed from the teacher

(23.08%) and that equal representation from all subject areas was needed in order for the method to work for their families (23.08%). There were a total of 62 responses given to the question, "How does the portfolio give a clear definition of your child's progress?" Of these responses, 70.96% were positive, while 29.03% were negative. Among the positive responses, the two most common responses included that the work samples provided a clear definition of their child's progress (40.91%) and that seeing growth provided a clear definition of their child's progress (25.01%). Among the negative responses, the two most common responses included that parents had not seen growth (33.33%) and that parents had only seen growth in some areas (27.78%). There were a total of 59 responses given to the question, "Does your child see the value of the work that goes into his or her portfolio and reflective analysis?" Of these responses, 74.58% indicated yes, 8.47% indicated no, and 16.95% indicated that their child understood somewhat the value of the work that goes into his or her portfolio and reflective analysis. In response to this question, 40 parents elaborated on why they felt their child did or did not understand the value of the portfolio process. Among these responses, 77.50% were positive and 22.50% were negative. Among the positive responses, the two most common responses included that the portfolio showed parents what the learner knew (25.80%) and that the learner was proud to share his or her work (25.80%). Among the negative responses, the two most common responses included 33.34% who felt their child did not understand and 22.22% who felt more specifically that their child did not understand the reflective analysis. There were a total of 56 responses given to the question, "How does portfolio assessment encourage accountability and responsibility?" Of these responses, 89.29% were positive and 10.71% were negative. Among the positive responses, the top three responses included taking ownership for putting the portfolio

together (18.00%), knowing that parents will review the portfolio (16.00%) and developing pride (14.00%). Among the negative responses, 50.00% felt that encouraging accountability and responsibility were not seen and 50.00% felt that it was unclear. The final question asked parents to give suggestions for a more effective portfolio process. A total of 42 suggestions were made. The most common suggestion was the desire to have an opportunity to meet with the teachers (38.10%). Two other popular suggestions included a request for more information on where the learner should be at (16.67%) and 14.29% suggested that conferences should be scheduled before or after school (See Appendix D).

The middle school results included 21 responses, representing approximately 38.18% of the parents with middle school children. Parents did not always respond to all questions on the reflection, and therefore there were not always 21 responses to each of the questions asked. In response to whether the portfolio was a good representation of their child's learning 90.48% responded yes and 9.52% responded no. There were a total of 18 responses to whether this method worked for the family. Of these responses, 50.00% were positive and 50.00% were negative. Among the positive responses, 44.45% responded that seeing strengths and weaknesses in every area allowed this method to work for their family. Among the negative responses, 22.22% listed reasons such as conferences needed to be scheduled at a different time, their child had difficulties in a specific subject area, their child had difficulty interpreting progress in some areas, and the need to have a facilitator present at the conferences. There were a total of 18 responses to the question, "How does the portfolio give a clear definition of your child's progress?" Among the 18 responses, 83.33% were positive and 16.66% were negative. The three most common positive responses included that parents could see where the learner was

at and where he or she needed to be (33.33%), that parents found the facilitator feedback helpful (20.00%) and that parents found the rubrics were helpful (20.00%). The two negative responses included parents who felt there was no change or progress seen in certain subject areas (66.66%) and parents who felt the portfolio gave a fair definition of their child's progress (33.33%). There were a total of 20 responses given to the question, "Does your child see the value of the work that goes into his or her portfolio and reflective analysis?" Of these responses 95.00% indicated yes and 5.00% indicated no. In response to this question, 13 parents elaborated on why they felt their child did or did not understand the value of the portfolio process. Among the positive responses, there were a variety of explanations given by just one parent respectively and the only response that represented more than one parent's opinion was that the reflective analysis allowed learners to analyze (18.18%). Among the two negative responses given, 50.00% (one parent) indicated the learner did not take pride in the 'look' of the portfolio and 50.00% (one parent) suggested the learner's attitude improved throughout the conference. There were a total of 18 responses to the question, "How does the portfolio assessment encourage accountability and responsibility?" Of these responses, 88.88% were positive and 11.11% were negative. Among the positive responses, the three responses each representing 18.75% of the parent responses included parents could ask questions and see the quality of work, the learner recognized his or her own mistakes or strengths and weaknesses and the learner could focus on organization skills. Among the two negative responses given, 50.00% (one parent) felt the learner and parent needed to get used to the portfolio process first and 50.00% (one parent) felt the portfolio process 'doesn't perpetuate initiative'. The final question asked parents to give suggestions for a more effective portfolio process. A total of 19 suggestions were made. The most common suggestion

made was the recommendation that facilitator interaction was needed at the portfolio conferences (36.84%). Another 15.79% suggested that alternate conference times were needed (See Appendix E).

The high school results included 15 responses, representing approximately 27.27% of parents with high school children. Parents did not always respond to all questions on the reflection, and therefore there were not always 15 responses to each of the questions asked. In response to whether the portfolio is a good representation of their child's learning, 73.33% responded yes and 26.67% responded no. There were a total of 11 responses to the question, "Does this method work for your family?" Of these responses, 36.36% were positive and 63.63% were negative. Among the positive responses, the most common reason was seeing the actual work, which represented 50.00% (two parents) of the positive responses. Among the negative responses, the most common reason was a need to have the facilitator present (57.14%). There were a total of 13 responses to the question, "How does the portfolio give a clear definition of your child's progress?" Among the 13 responses, 61.54% were positive and 38.46% were negative. Among the positive responses, the most common answer given was seeing the actual work (62.50%). Among the negative responses, all five of the responses given represented 20.00% (one parent) of the negative responses. Reasons why the portfolio did not give a clear definition of their child's progress included no explanation of grade given, not this year, wanted to see 'rework', saw only the best work, and needed grade reports from teachers. There were a total of 14 responses given to the question, "Does your child see the value of the work that goes into his or her portfolio and reflective analysis?" Of these responses, 64.29% responded yes, 7.14% responded no and not known respectively and 21.43% responded

sometimes. In response to this question, 7 parents elaborated on why they felt their child did or did not understand the value of the portfolio process. Among the positive responses, each of the five responses represented 20.00% (one parent) of the positive responses. Reasons why parents felt their child understood the value of the work that goes into his or her portfolio and of the reflective analysis included the portfolio reflects learning, working on their senior portfolio, 'beat into his brain', neat portfolio, and overview of growth. Among the two negative responses, 50.00% (one parent) indicated there was no facilitator oversight and 50.00% (one parent) indicated more effort would be put into the next portfolio. There were 13 responses to the question, "How does portfolio assessment encourage learner accountability and responsibility?" Of these responses, 84.62% were positive and 15.38% were negative. The most common positive response was presenting and explaining work, which represented 45.46% of the responses. The two negative responses included 50.00% (one parent) who indicated that there would be accountability and responsibility if the portfolio were handled the way it used to be and 50.00% (one parent) who indicated he or she was not sure. The final question asked parents to give suggestions for a more effective portfolio process. A total of 13 suggestions were made. The most common suggestion made was a need for teacher involvement, which represented 76.93% of the suggestions (See Appendix F).

The parent reflections completed during the 2001/2002 school year were analyzed to compare parent responses on these reflections to the more recent reflections previously described. The main challenge of analyzing last year's reflections was that many of the completed forms were misplaced or discarded. More specifically, there were a very limited number of parent reflections from the middle school and no parent reflections from the high

school. Furthermore, it was not possible to pool the elementary school data because the January, 2002 portfolio conference parent reflections were the only complete set of data available. However, it should be noted that the January, 2002 results were similar to the results of the other sets of incomplete data. Another challenge was that the parent reflection form used in previous years differed from the one used in October, 2002 and thus there were differences in the types of data collected. This study included a specific analysis of the responses to two Likert-type scale questions rated from 1 to 5, with 1 being 'a little' and 5 being 'very much'. The elementary school data for January, 2002 included 68 reflections from parents with children in kindergarten to fifth grade. The parents' rating of how much they learned from their child from the portfolio session yielded 54.41% who gave a rating of 5 (very much), 36.76% who gave a rating of 4, 7.35% who gave a rating of 3, and 1.47% who gave a rating of 2. The parents' rating of how much the rubric assessment attached to the learner's work helped them understand the current performance of their child yielded 42.65% who gave a rating of 5 (very much), 35.29% who gave a rating of 4, 10.29% who gave a rating of 3, 5.88% who gave a rating of 2, 1.47% who gave a rating of 1 (a little), and 4.41% who did not give a rating. The middle school data for the January 2002 portfolio conferences included 5 parent reflections. The parents' rating of how much they learned from their child from the portfolio session yielded 20.00% who gave a rating of 5 (very much) and 80.00% who gave a rating of 4. The parents' rating of how much the rubric assessment attached to the learner's work helped them understand the current performance of their child yielded 20.00% who gave a rating of 5 (very much), 60.00% who gave a rating of 4 and 20.00% who gave a rating of 3 (See Appendix G). This study also consisted of a list of all suggestions made by parents about what they would like to see in the conferences. This list

represented suggestions made on all 180 parent reflections for the 2001/2002 school year (See Appendix H).

There were 16 facilitator surveys completed for this study, representing 94.18% of the teaching staff at ACT Academy. The facilitators' description of their understanding of the current portfolio process at ACT Academy yielded 31.25% with extensive understanding, 50.00% with moderate to extensive understanding, and 18.75% with moderate understanding. Their description of their understanding of the reflective analysis process at ACT Academy yielded 25.00% with extensive understanding, 43.75% with moderate to extensive understanding, and 31.25% with moderate understanding. Their description of the amount of training or background they have in portfolio assessment yielded 18.75% with extensive training or background, 18.75% with moderate to extensive training or background, 43.75% with moderate training or background and 18.75% with limited to moderate training or background. Their description of the understanding they have of their learners' academic needs as a result of the portfolio process yielded 25.00% with extensive understanding, 50.00% with moderate to extensive understanding, 6.67% with moderate understanding, and 18.75% with limited to moderate understanding. The degree to which facilitators felt the information they gleaned from their learners' portfolios influenced their future instruction was described as extensive by 25.00%, moderate to extensive by 25.00%, moderate by 31.25%, limited to moderate by 12.50%, and limited by 6.67%. Responses to the questions pertaining to the number of hours allotted for portfolio conference preparations were varied and difficult to quantify. The amount of class hours allotted for learners to prepare for a portfolio conference varied from 0 hours to 25 to 30 hours. The amount of hours facilitators spent on preparing for portfolio conferences ranged from

0 hours to a week. In response to whether facilitators felt they should be present to interact with parents and learners during conferences 60.00% responded yes, 6.66% responded no, 20.00% responded that it depends, and 13.33% indicated that they were unsure. In response to the types of training opportunities facilitators felt would benefit their understanding of portfolio assessment, learning more about how their colleagues at ACT Academy carry out portfolio assessment and learning more about how other schools carry out portfolio assessment each yielded 30.56%. Having access to resource materials (i.e. books) about portfolio assessment yielded 16.66% while holding regular discussion groups about portfolio assessment strategies yielded 19.44%. The only 'other' suggestion made was rubrics in portfolios, which yielded 2.78% (See Appendix I).

Conclusions

The results of the parent reflections and teacher surveys revealed that both parents and teachers at ACT Academy felt that the portfolio process was a valid form of assessment. There was a strong indication among most of the parent reflections that growth and learning could be identified. Responses to the teacher surveys suggested that there was an interest in improving the portfolio process through dialogue and training. The findings of this study, therefore, left the first author confident that refinement of the current portfolio process at ACT Academy would be a worthwhile endeavor.

The parent reflections completed during the January, 2002 portfolio conferences indicated that elementary school parents felt strongly that they were learning about their child as a result of the portfolio process and that the rubric assessment assisted them with this understanding. Of the comparatively few middle school responses, parents' ratings were

somewhat lower; however, the responses still indicated a high level of satisfaction. Given the few number of suggestions made within the 180 parent reflections reviewed for this study, the first author comfortably concluded that parents were generally satisfied with the portfolio process during the 2001/2002 school year.

In contrast, the parent reflections completed during the October, 2002 portfolio conferences revealed a lower level of satisfaction. Due to a change in the school calendar and a reduction in teacher workdays, the October, 2002 portfolio conferences were held during the regular school day. Therefore, teachers were no longer available to meet with parents and learners during the portfolio conferences, as has been the practice in previous years. The October, 2002 parent reflections suggested that most parents with children in the elementary, middle, and high schools continued to feel that the portfolio was a good representation of the their child's learning. Furthermore, positive responses outweighed negative responses with regard to feeling that the portfolio gave a clear definition of their child's learning, that their child valued the work that goes into the portfolio and reflective analysis, and that the portfolio promoted accountability and responsibility. However, negative responses outweighed positive responses in the elementary and high school data related to whether or not this method worked for the family. The middle school results were divided equally among negative and positive responses. The most common negative response was a need to have the facilitator present in order for this method to work for the family. Another frequent response was a need to see more work or to be given more information. By comparison to the previous year's parent reflections, the October, 2002 parent reflections included an abundance of suggestions for a more effective portfolio process. The suggestion made with greatest frequency was a need to meet with

facilitators during the conferences. The October, 2002 parent reflections clearly indicated that the teachers needed to remain a part of the portfolio conference process if parent satisfaction and support are desired. Given that parent support is a crucial aspect of the portfolio process, it seems vital to address this issue (Hebert, 2001).

The teacher surveys similarly revealed that the majority of ACT Academy facilitators felt that the facilitators should be present to interact with parents and teachers during the portfolio conferences. The results of the teacher surveys also indicated that while most teachers felt they had a high level of understanding of the portfolio and reflective analysis process at ACT Academy, teachers generally felt that they had limited training or background in portfolio assessment. Many teachers indicated an interest in pursuing one or more of the training options listed. Thus there appeared to be a need to address teacher training about portfolio assessment at ACT Academy. Furthermore, most teachers felt that the portfolio process gave them a better understanding of their learners' academic needs; yet fewer teachers suggested that the information they gleaned from the portfolios influenced their future instruction. According to Fu and Lamme (2002), the portfolio experience should be informing teachers' instructional strategies and curriculum. This issue could be addressed at teacher training. Finally, there were great variations in the amount of time that teachers allotted for preparing for portfolio conferences. While there would be no need to standardize this aspect of the portfolio process, the first author questioned how some teachers could be allotting so little time to the process both within and beyond instructional time.

After reviewing approximately 300 parent reflections, the first author continued to believe that it would be beneficial to develop parent-training materials, including a parent

handbook and videotape, to improve the portfolio process at ACT Academy. In particular, many of the comments offered by parents of early elementary learners indicated that more explicit training about the method and purpose of alternative assessment was needed. The potential components of the parent handbook, which will be presented to the ACT Academy director and facilitators for their input in January, 2003, were compiled (See Appendix J). It is expected that these materials will then be created and distributed in Spring, 2003.

The facilitator surveys and discussions with the director of ACT Academy have supported the first author's belief that there is a need for facilitator training about portfolio assessment at ACT Academy. A critical concern that would need to be addressed before the next round of portfolio conferences in late January 2002, is allowing for direct facilitator involvement in the conferences. Due to the results of this study, the importance of addressing this concern will be brought to the attention of the ACT Academy staff and administration in the near future. After resolving this issue, the facilitators can then focus on pursuing training opportunities, which are vital to the success of portfolio implementation (Weldin & Tumarkin, 1998/1999). The two training opportunities that facilitators were most interested in included learning more about how their colleagues at ACT Academy carry out portfolio assessment and learning more about how other schools carry out portfolio assessment. The first author intends to organize a training session(s) with the assistance of the ACT Academy director to facilitate an exchange of portfolio expertise among the current teaching staff at ACT Academy. In addition, the first author plans to develop a presentation for Spring, 2003 to share information about other schools that carry out portfolio assessment. Another training opportunity to pursue is hosting a guest speaker or trainer with a background in portfolio assessment.

The improvement of the portfolio process at ACT Academy, through the development of parent training materials and facilitator training, will directly address a focal point of the 2002-2003 Campus Improvement Plan. More importantly, it is hoped that by developing a more successful portfolio process, ACT Academy will be able to retain this unique method of alternative assessment. ACT Academy has the opportunity to market and promote a successful portfolio process to other schools and school districts in the future. This would be a great service to the learners of tomorrow who have much to gain from alternative assessment.

The experience of ACT Academy has demonstrated that portfolio assessment can be used as an effective tool to evaluate student growth. Standardized test results only offer administrators and teachers information about a child's understanding at a given moment in time, therefore a passing score may or may not indicate a child's true comprehension of a subject area. In addition, as the stakes of passing such tests increase, the pressure to develop strategies to ensure that learners pass the test will rise. Alternative assessment, on the other hand, allows administrators, instructors, parents and learners to document a child's growth over time in a less stressful manner. Even in the age of comprehensive standardized testing, the use of authentic methods, such as portfolios, will be necessary to ensure that administrators and teachers gain a true understanding of what a child knows and what he or she needs to learn.

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APPENDICES

ACT Academy Portfolio Conferences
October 23-25, 2002
Evaluation Form Learning Area:_____

Parents: Because of the changes in our calendar, ACT has had to revise the portfolio process to be conducted during school days. We ask especially for this first conference that you complete this evaluation to assist us in our ongoing task of excellence in reporting your child's learning. Please feel free to write on the back or use additional paper. Thank you for your time!

1. **Is the portfolio process a good representation of your child's learning for the nine weeks? Does this method work for your family? Why or why not?**

2. **How does the portfolio give a clear definition of your child's progress?**

3. **Does your child understand the value of the work that goes into his/her portfolio and of the reflective analysis? Why or why not?**

4. **How does portfolio assessment encourage learner accountability and responsibility?**

5. **In this transition process, what suggestions do you have for a more effective portfolio system?**

PARENT REFLECTION

Please help evaluate our learner-led parent conferences by completing this form.
Thank you!

1. Please rate how much you learned about your child from the portfolio session.

a little				very much
1	2	3	4	5

2. Please rate how much the rubric assessment attached to the learner's work helped you understand the current performance of your child.

a little				very much
1	2	3	4	5

3. Please comment on the portfolio itself .

4. Please comment on or suggest any changes that you would like to see in the conferences.

5. Parent/Learner Comments: (please write together)

6. Learner's goals for the next nine weeks: (please write together)

FACILITATOR SURVEY ON PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

PURPOSE: This survey has been prepared in an effort to improve the portfolio assessment process at ACT Academy. Both ACT Academy and Texas Woman's University are supporting this field research project. ***All survey responses will be kept confidential.***

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer the questions below by checking the box that best describes your answer to the question asked.

1 = Limited 3 = Moderate 5 = Extensive

1	2	3	4	5	
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	How would you describe your understanding of the current portfolio process at ACT Academy?
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	How would you describe your understanding of the reflective analysis process at ACT Academy?
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	How would you describe the amount of training/background you have in portfolio assessment?
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	How would you describe the understanding you have of your learners' academic needs as a result of the portfolio process?
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	To what degree, does the information you glean from your learners' portfolios influence your future instruction?

INSTRUCTIONS: Please complete the survey questions below by answering the questions asked.

How many hours of class time do you allot for *your learners* to prepare for a portfolio conference? _____

On average, how many hours do *you* spend preparing for each portfolio conference? _____

Do you feel that facilitators should be present to interact with parents/learners during conferences? _____

Which of the following training opportunities (if any) do you feel would benefit your understanding of portfolio assessment? (Check as many as apply)

- ☐ Having access to resource materials (i.e. books) about portfolio assessment
- ☐ Learning more about how your colleagues at ACT Academy carry out portfolio assessment
- ☐ Holding regular discussion groups about portfolio assessment strategies
- ☐ Learning more about how other schools carry out portfolio assessment
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Other comments (optional):

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX D

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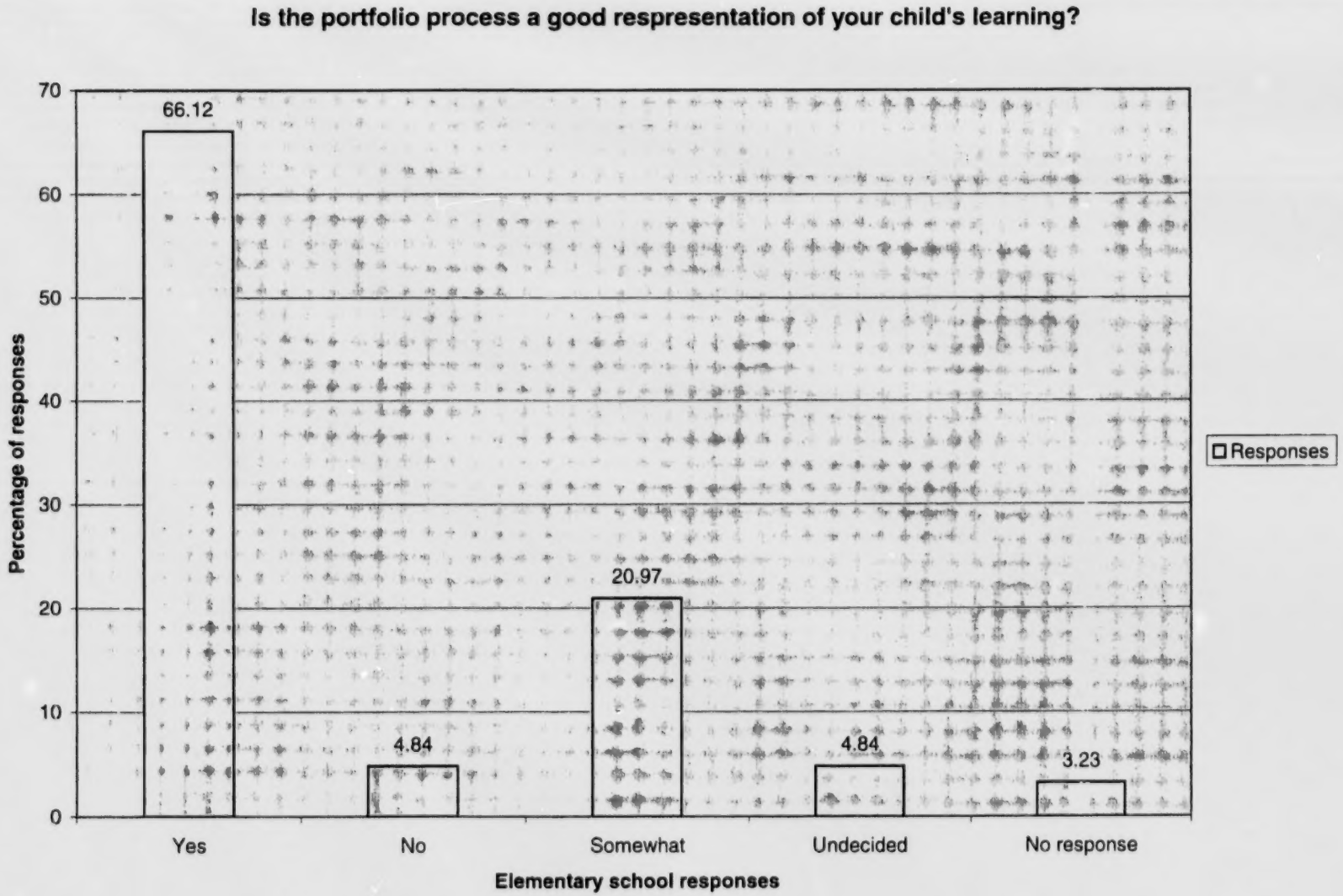

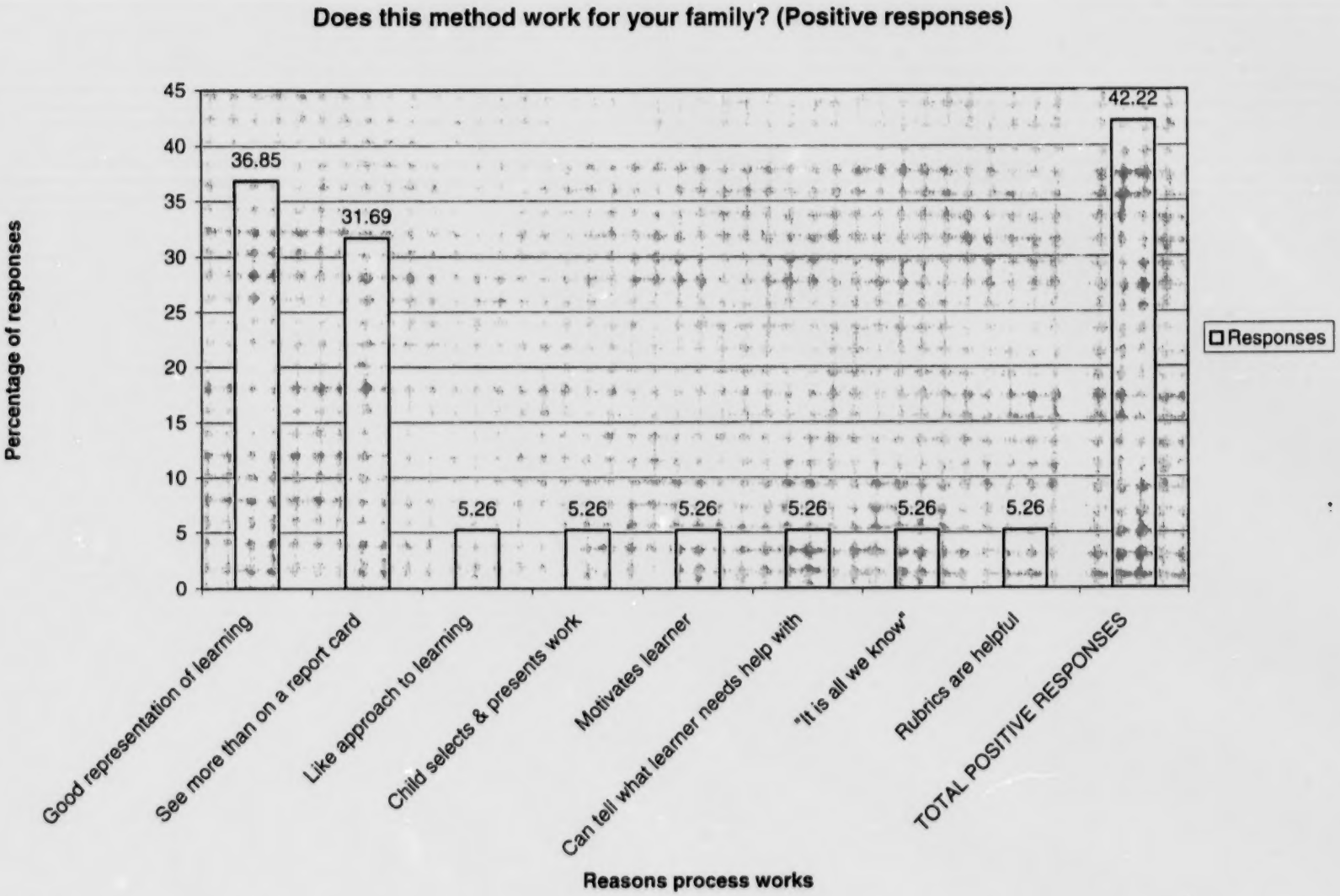

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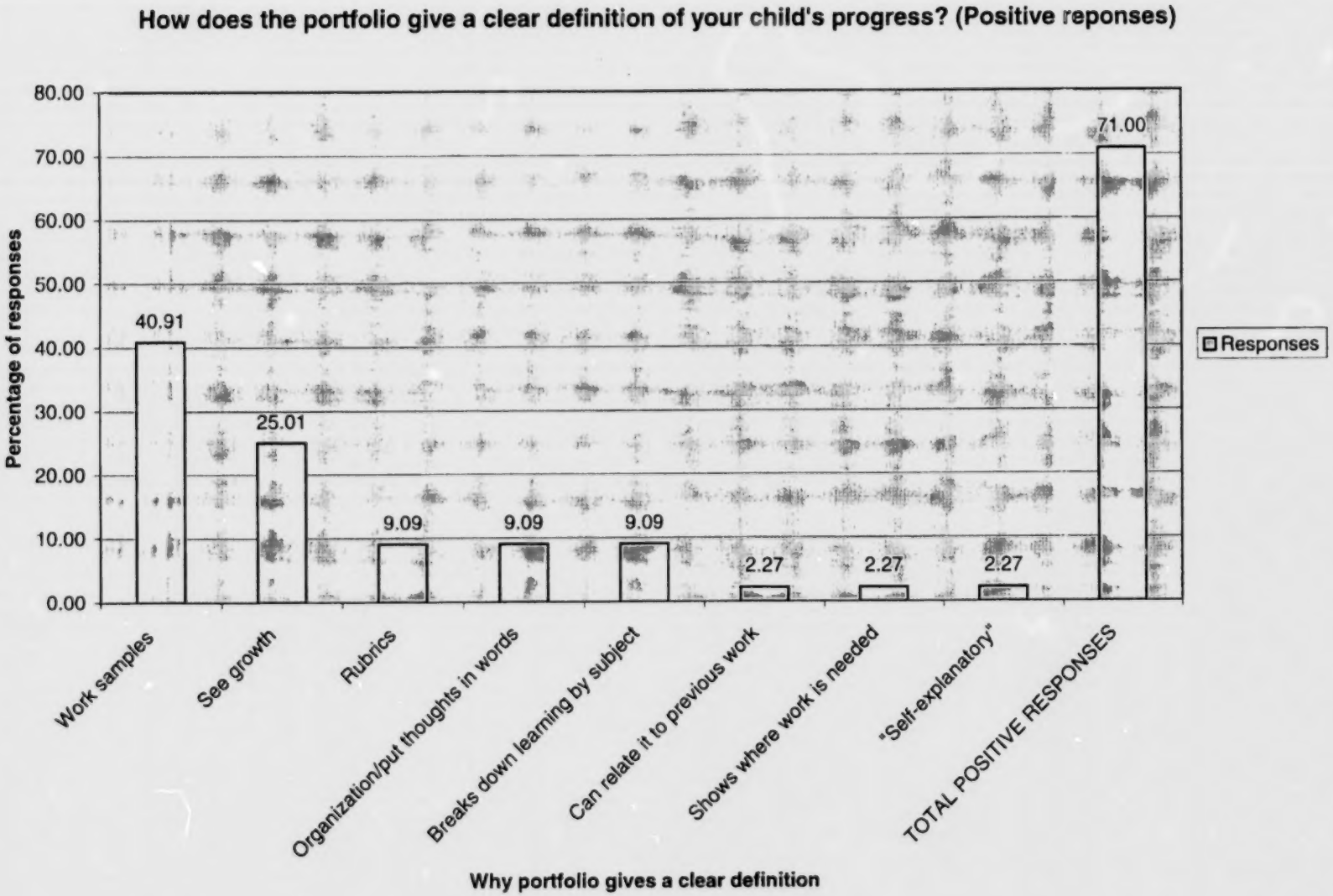

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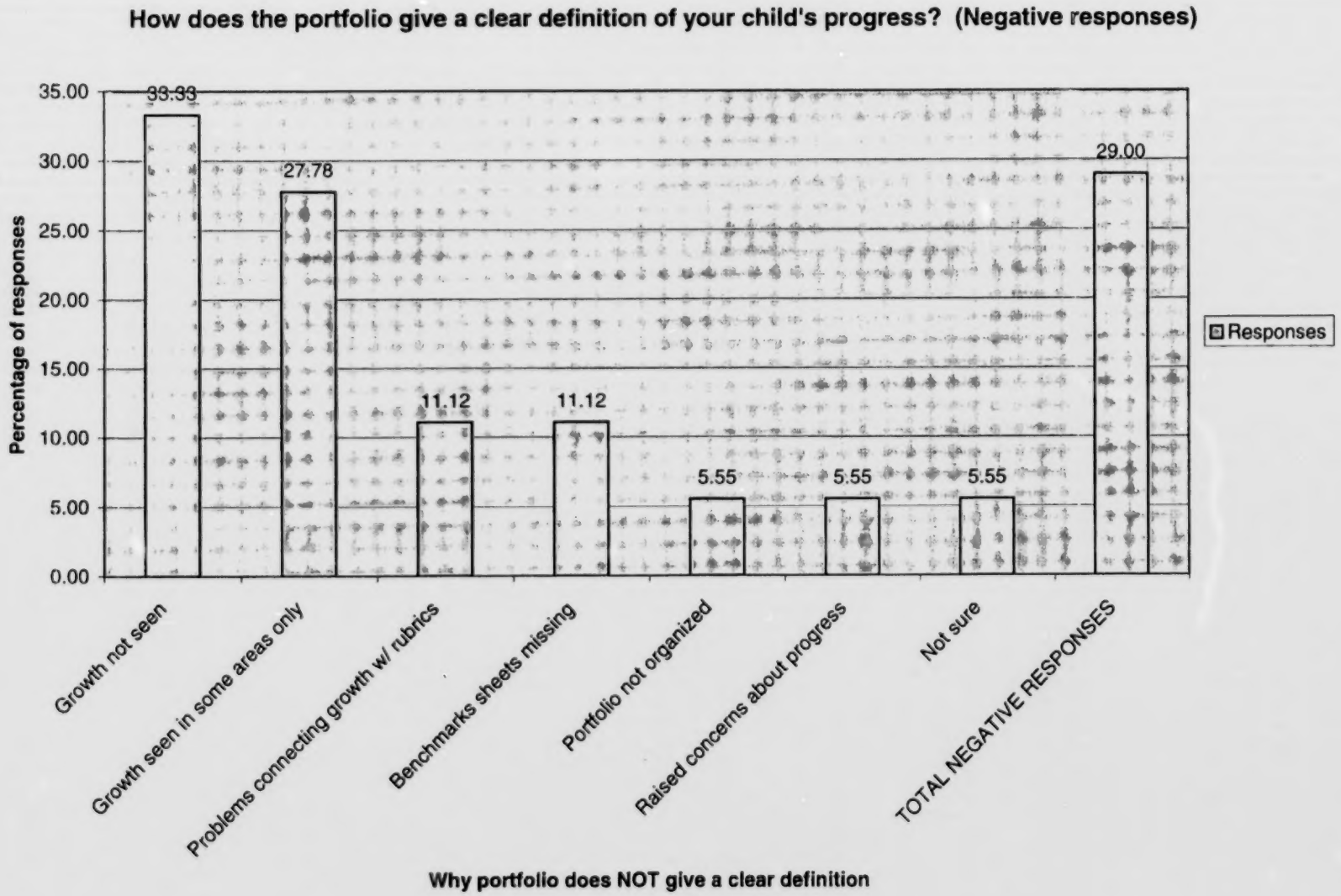
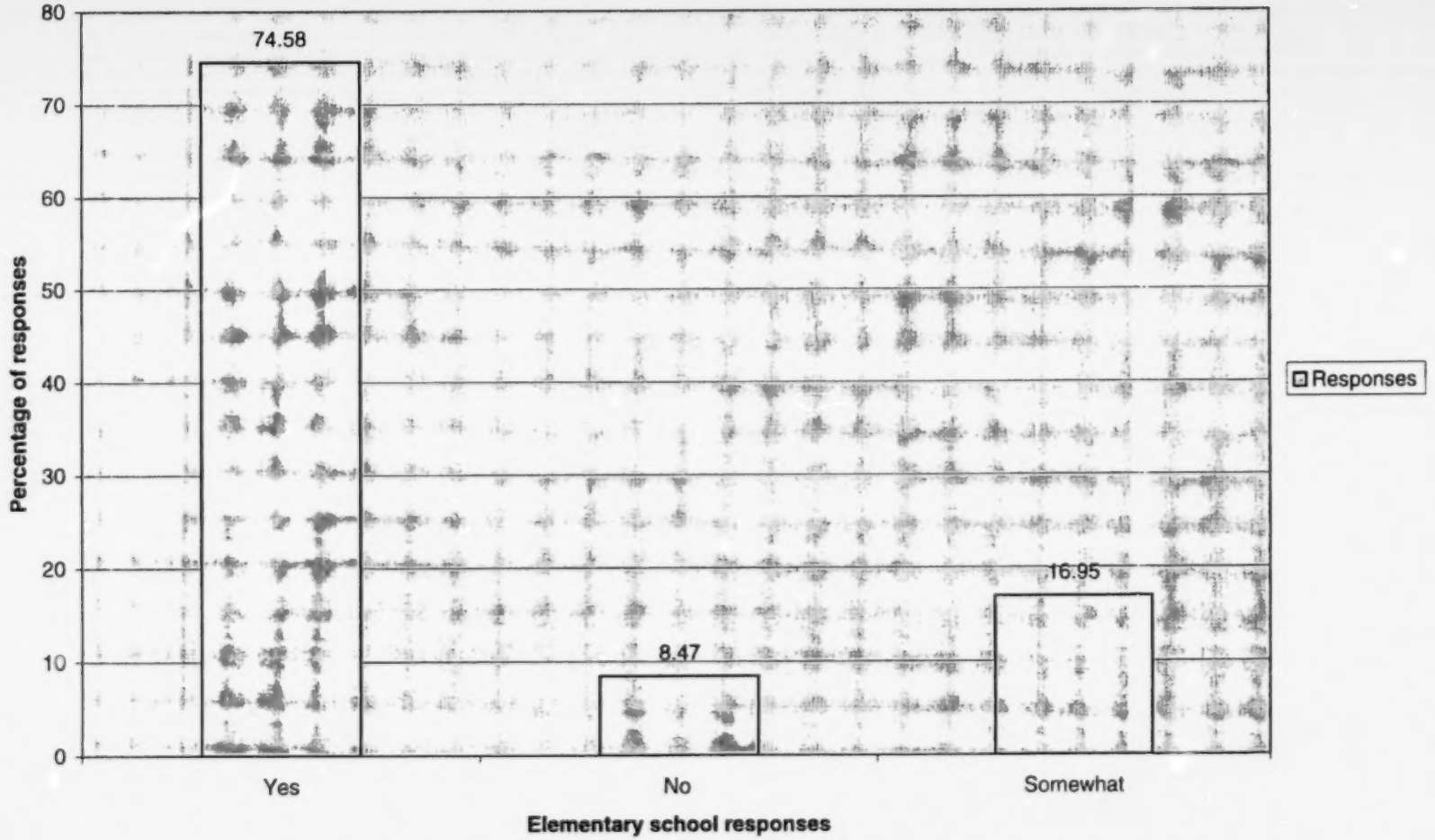

How does the portfolio give a clear definition of your child's progress? (Negative responses)
Percentage of responses
35.00
30.00
25.00
20.00
15.00
10.00
5.00
0.00
33.33
27.78
11.12
11.12
5.55
5.55
5.55
29.00
Responses
Growth not seen
Growth seen in some areas only
Problems connecting growth w/ rubrics
Benchmarks sheets missing
Portfolio not organized
Raised concerns about progress
Not sure
TOTAL NEGATIVE RESPONSES
Why portfolio does NOT give a clear definition

Does your child understand the value of the work that goes into his/her portfolio and of the reflective analysis?



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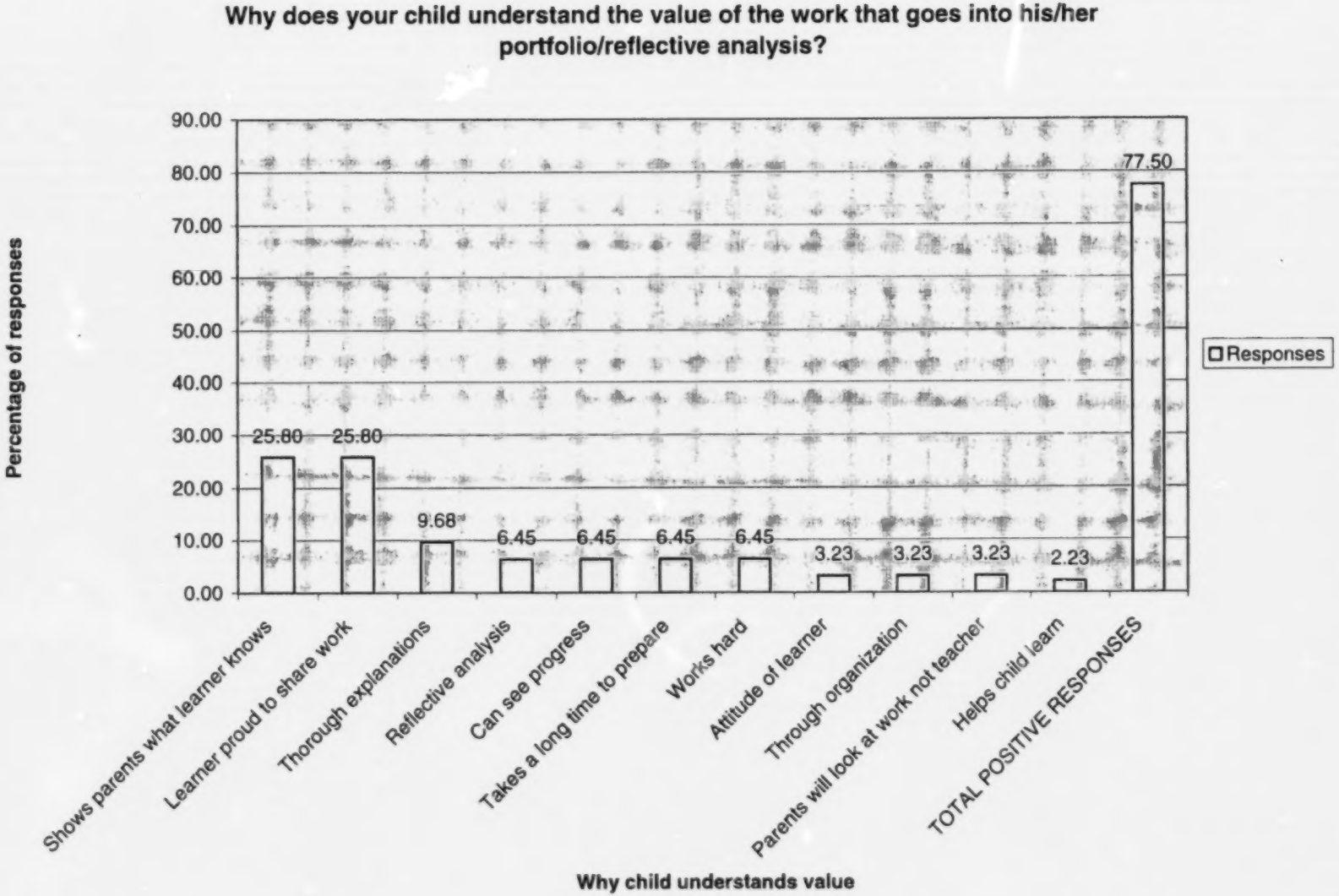

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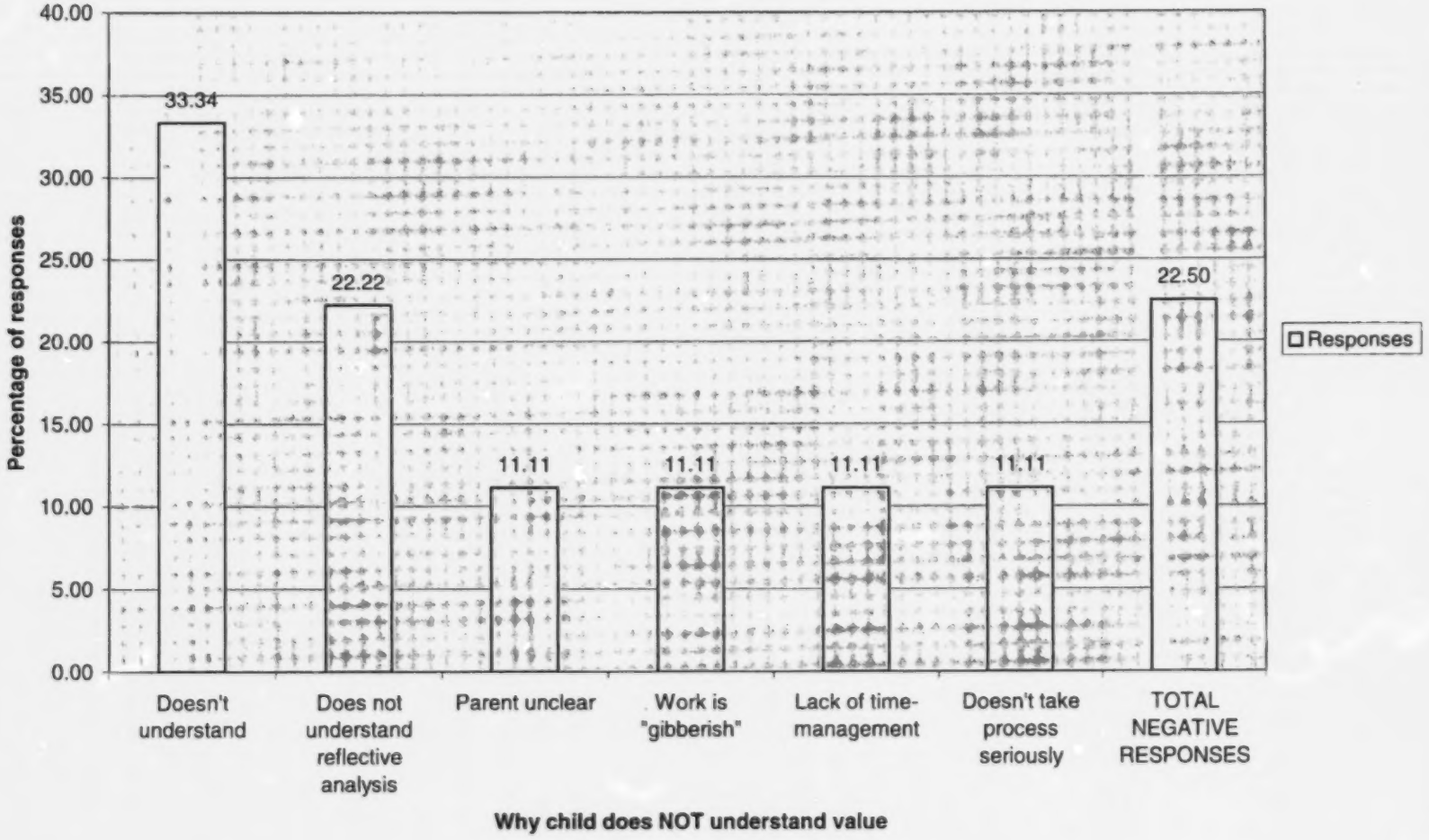
Why your child does NOT understand the value of the work that goes into his/her portfolio/reflective analysis?



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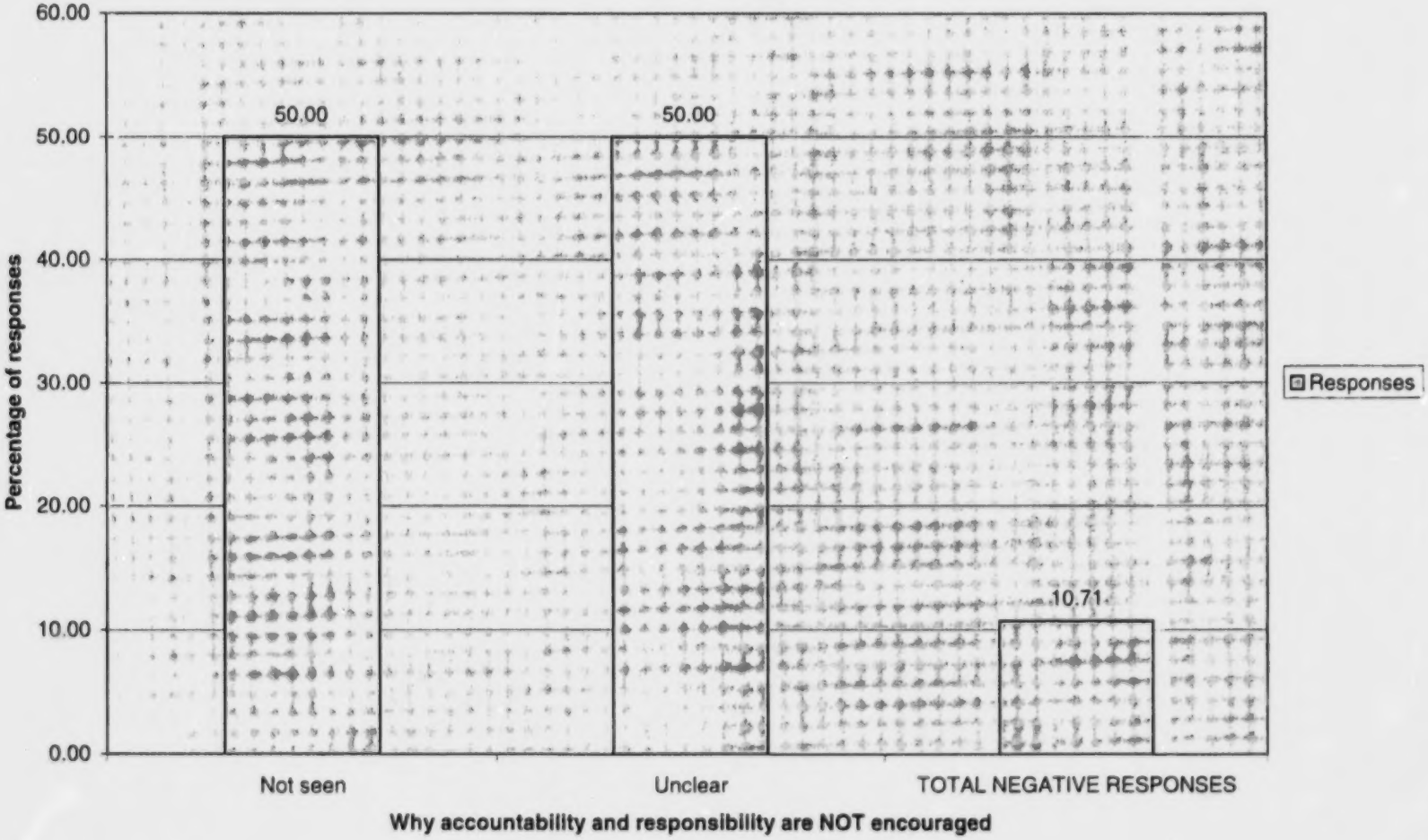
How does portfolio assessment encourage accountability and responsibility? (Negative responses)



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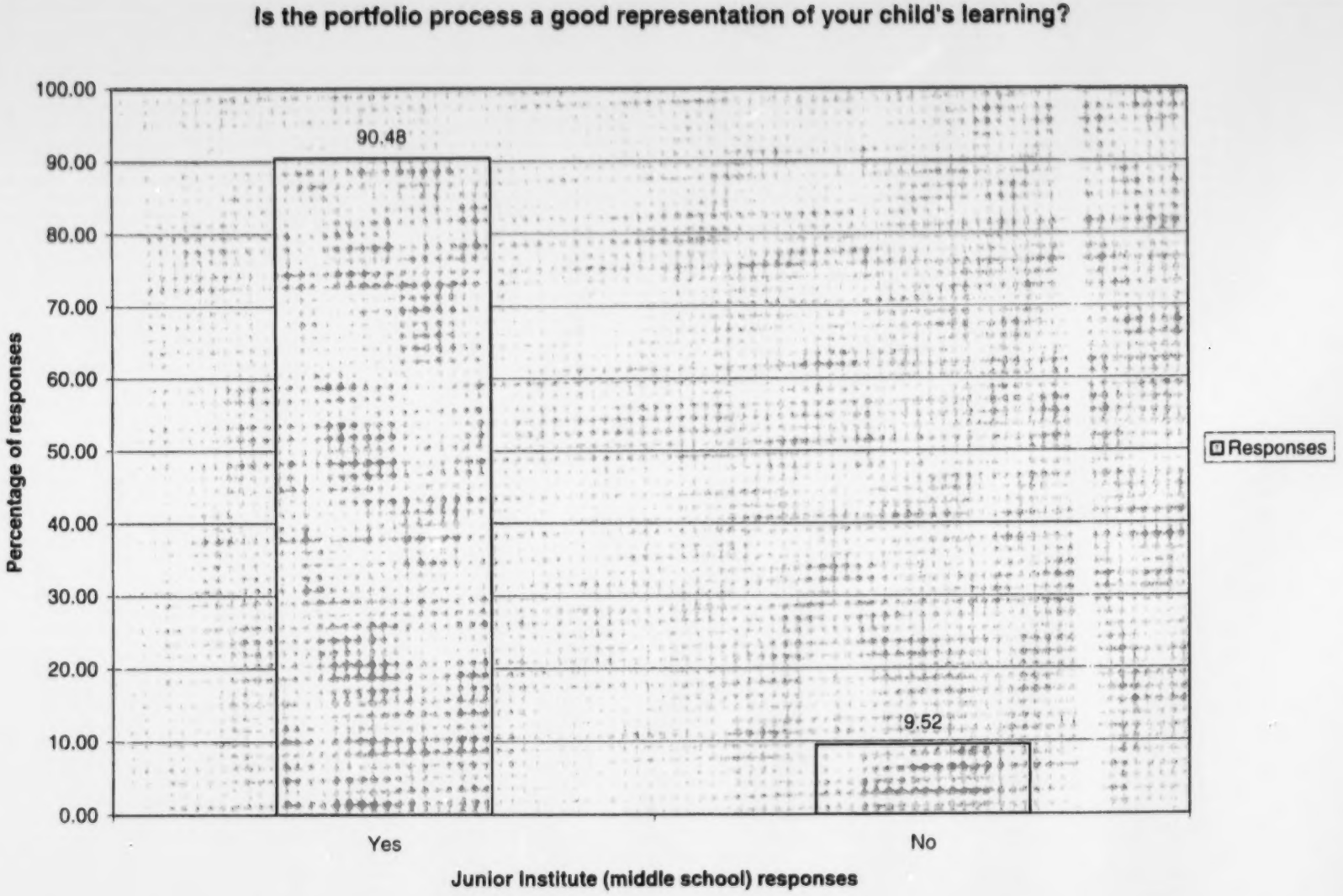
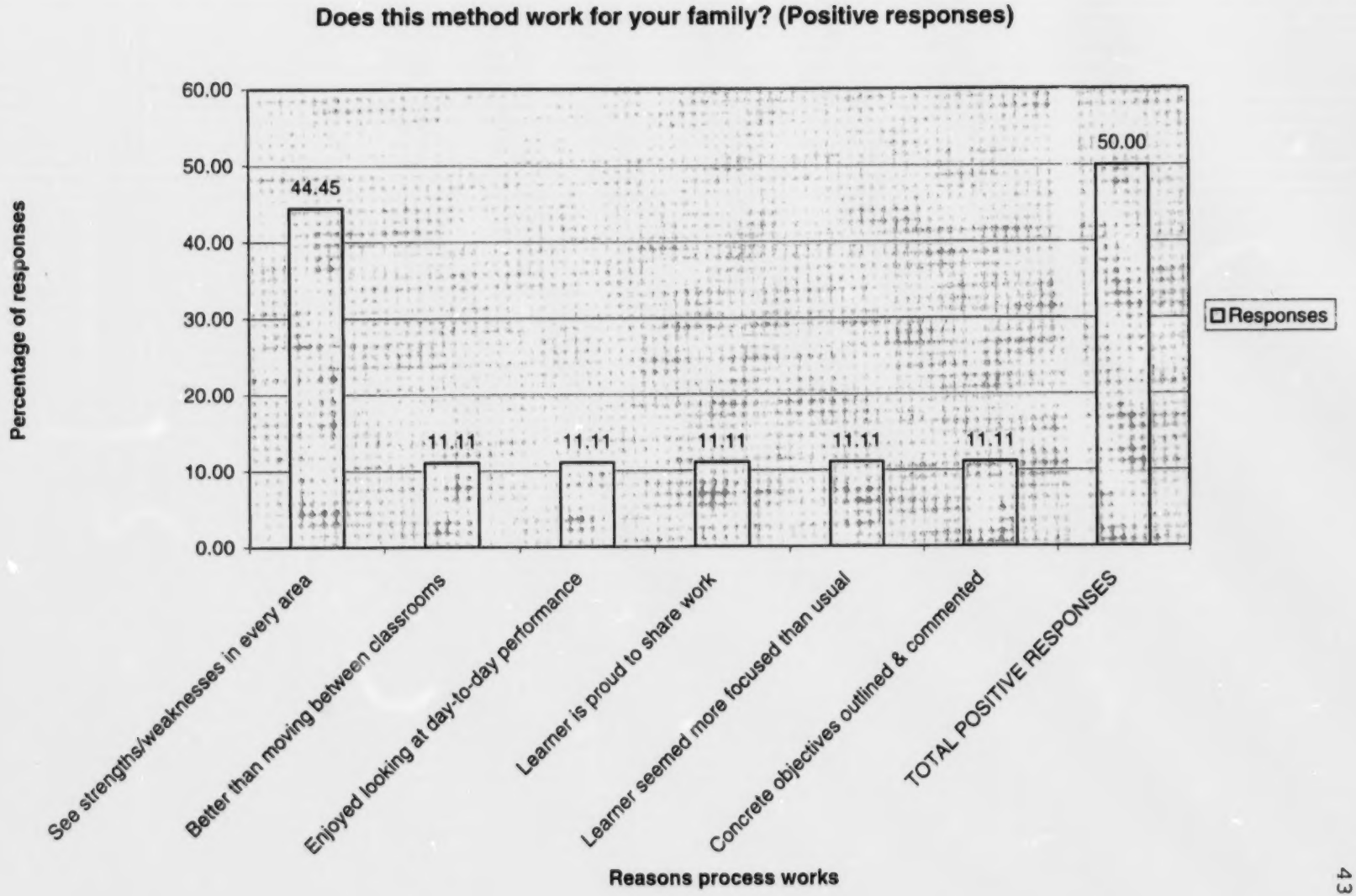
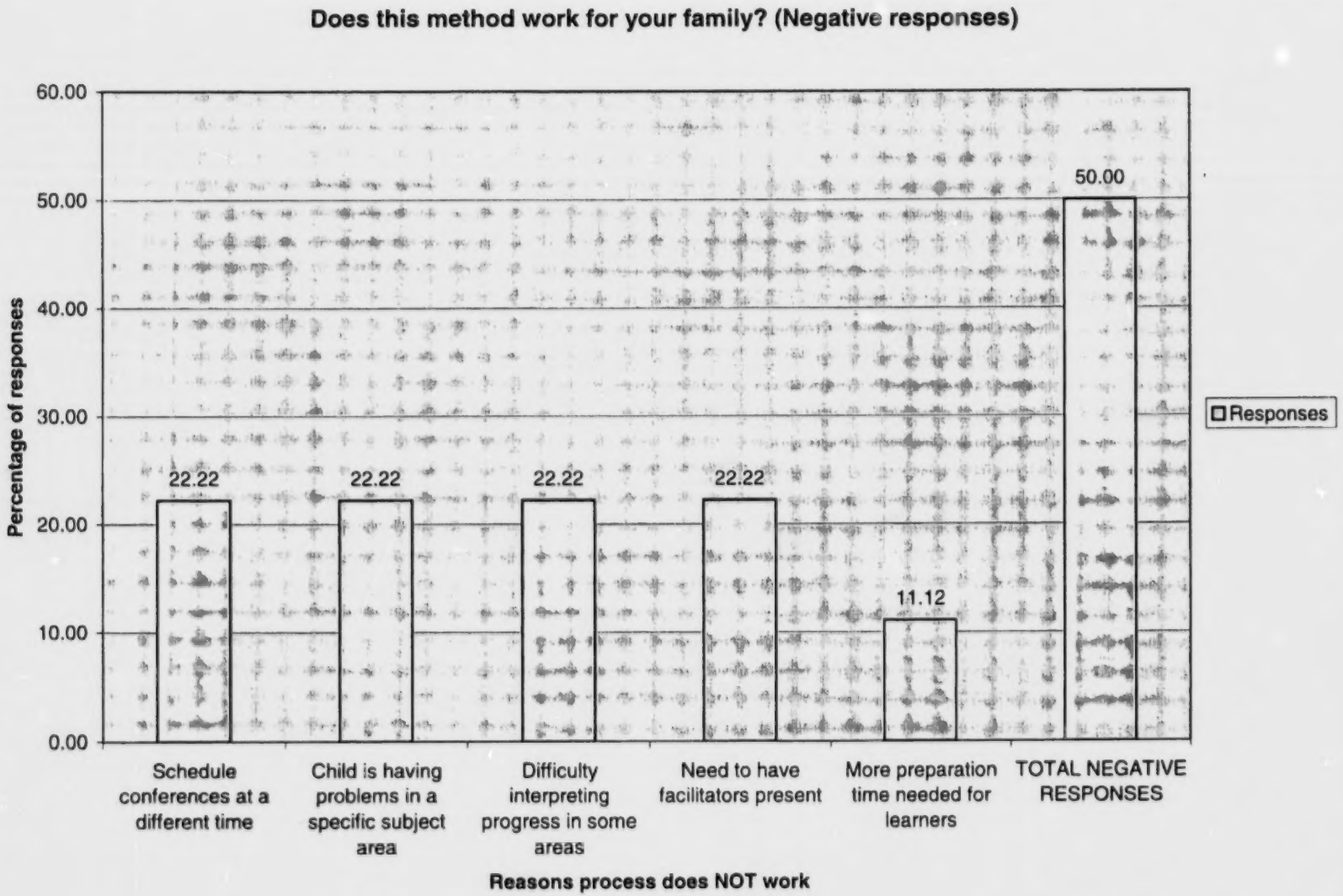
APPENDIX E


Is the portfolio process a good representation of your child's learning?
100.00
90.00
80.00
70.00
60.00
50.00
40.00
30.00
20.00
10.00
0.00
Percentage of responses
90.48
9.52
Yes
No
Junior Institute (middle school) responses
Responses


Does this method work for your family? (Positive responses)
Percentage of responses
60.00
50.00
40.00
30.00
20.00
10.00
0.00
44.45
11.11
11.11
11.11
11.11
11.11
50.00
Responses
See strengths/weaknesses in every area
Better than moving between classrooms
Enjoyed looking at day-to-day performance
Learner is proud to share work
Learner seemed more focused than usual
Concrete objectives outlined & commented
TOTAL POSITIVE RESPONSES
Reasons process works



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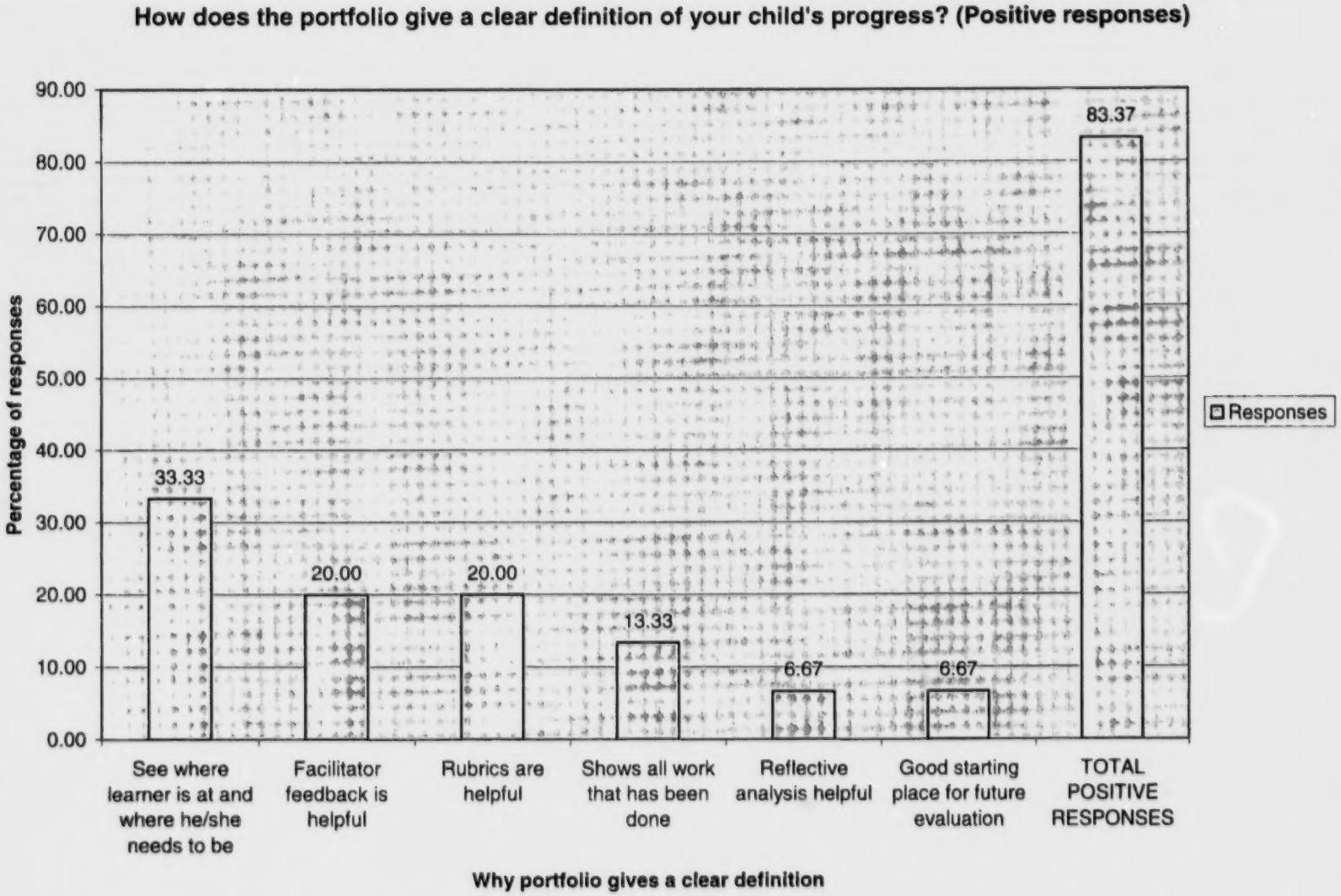
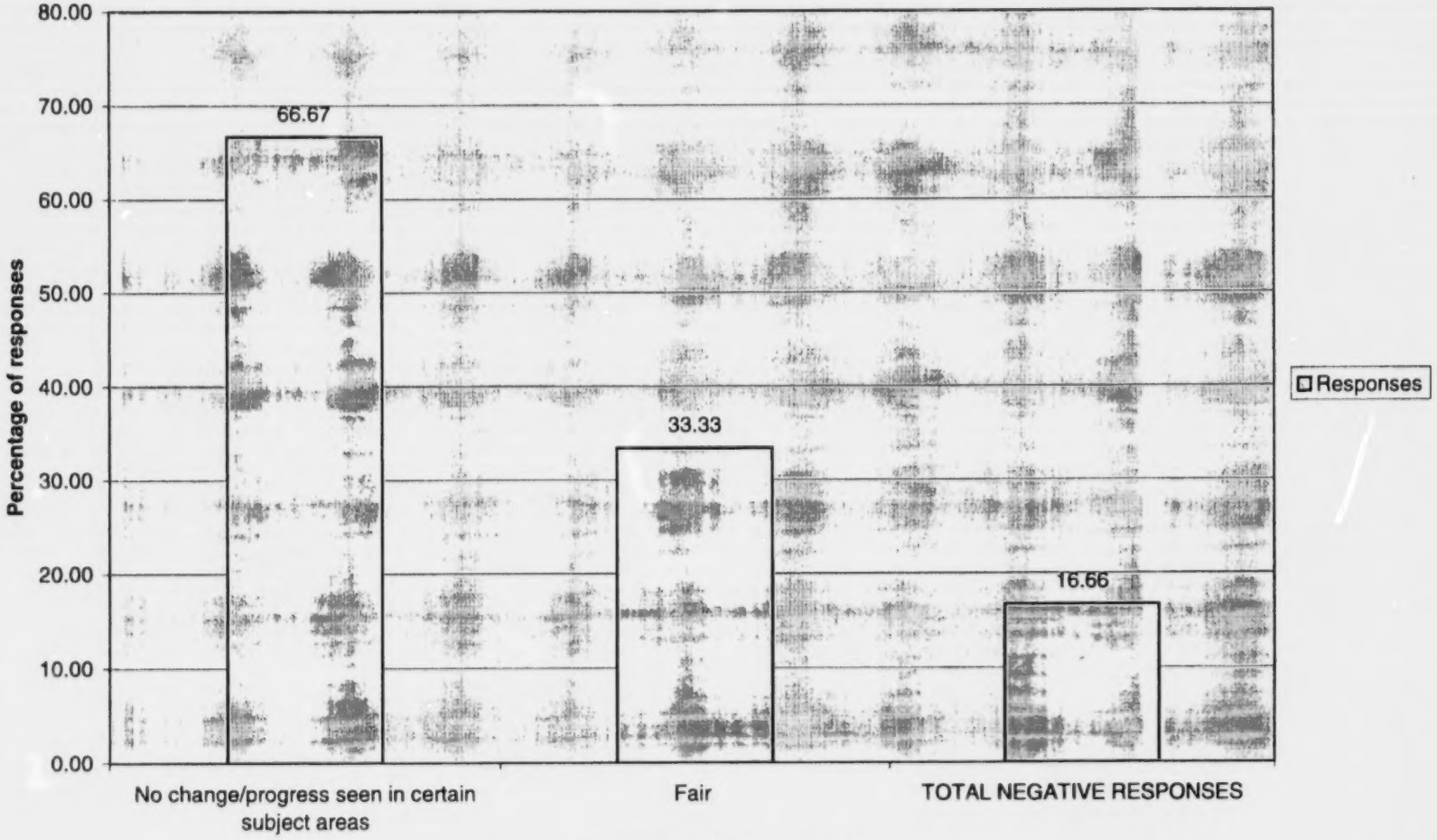
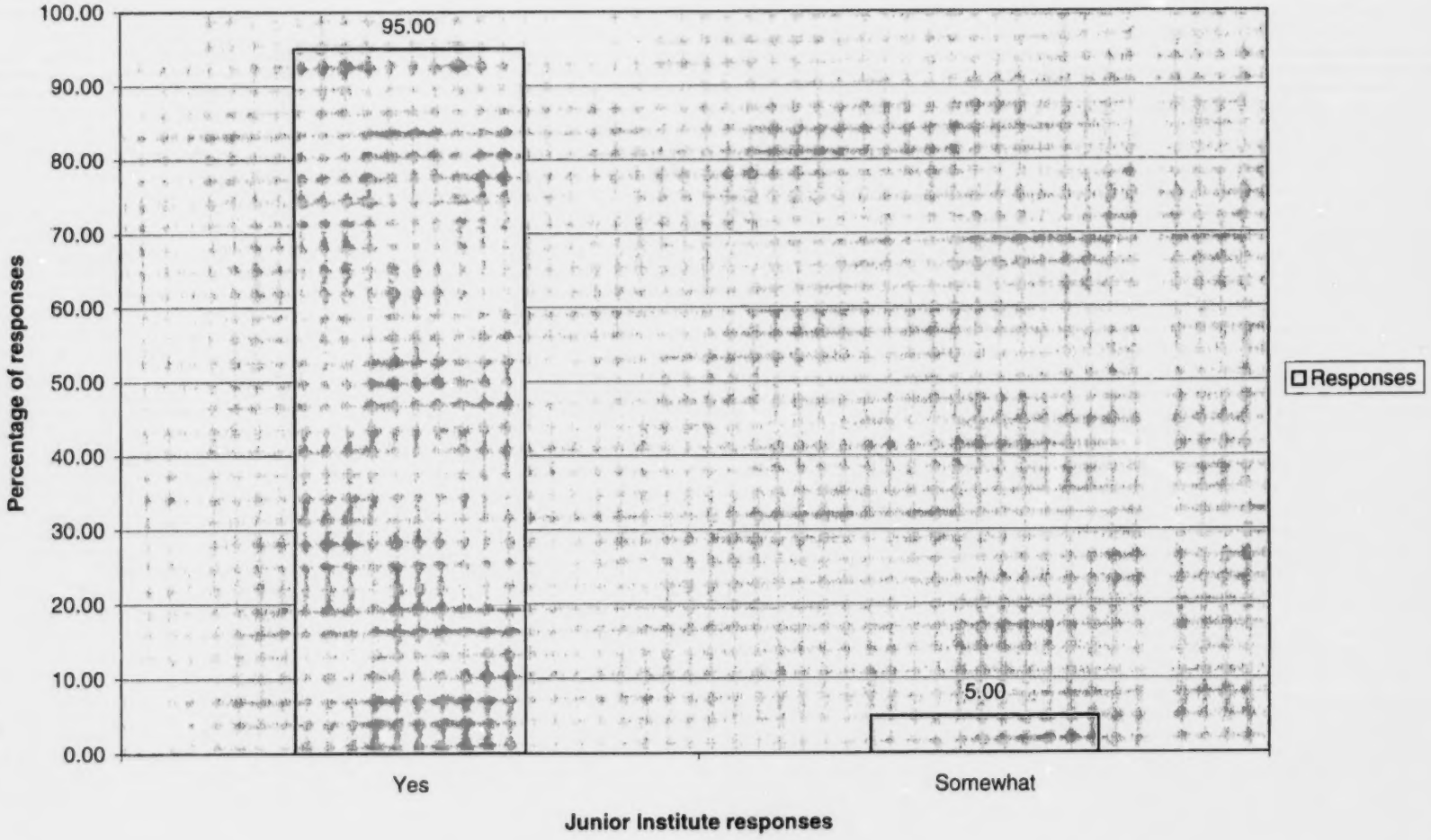

How does the portfolio give a clear definition of your child's progress? (Positive responses)
90.00
80.00
70.00
60.00
50.00
40.00
30.00
20.00
10.00
0.00
Percentage of responses
33.33
20.00
20.00
13.33
6.67
6.67
83.37
Responses
See where learner is at and where he/she needs to be
Facilitator feedback is helpful
Rubrics are helpful
Shows all work that has been done
Reflective analysis helpful
Good starting place for future evaluation
TOTAL POSITIVE RESPONSES
Why portfolio gives a clear definition

How does the portfolio give a clear definition of your child's progress? (Negative responses)



Does your child understand the value of the work that goes into his/her portfolio and of the reflective analysis?



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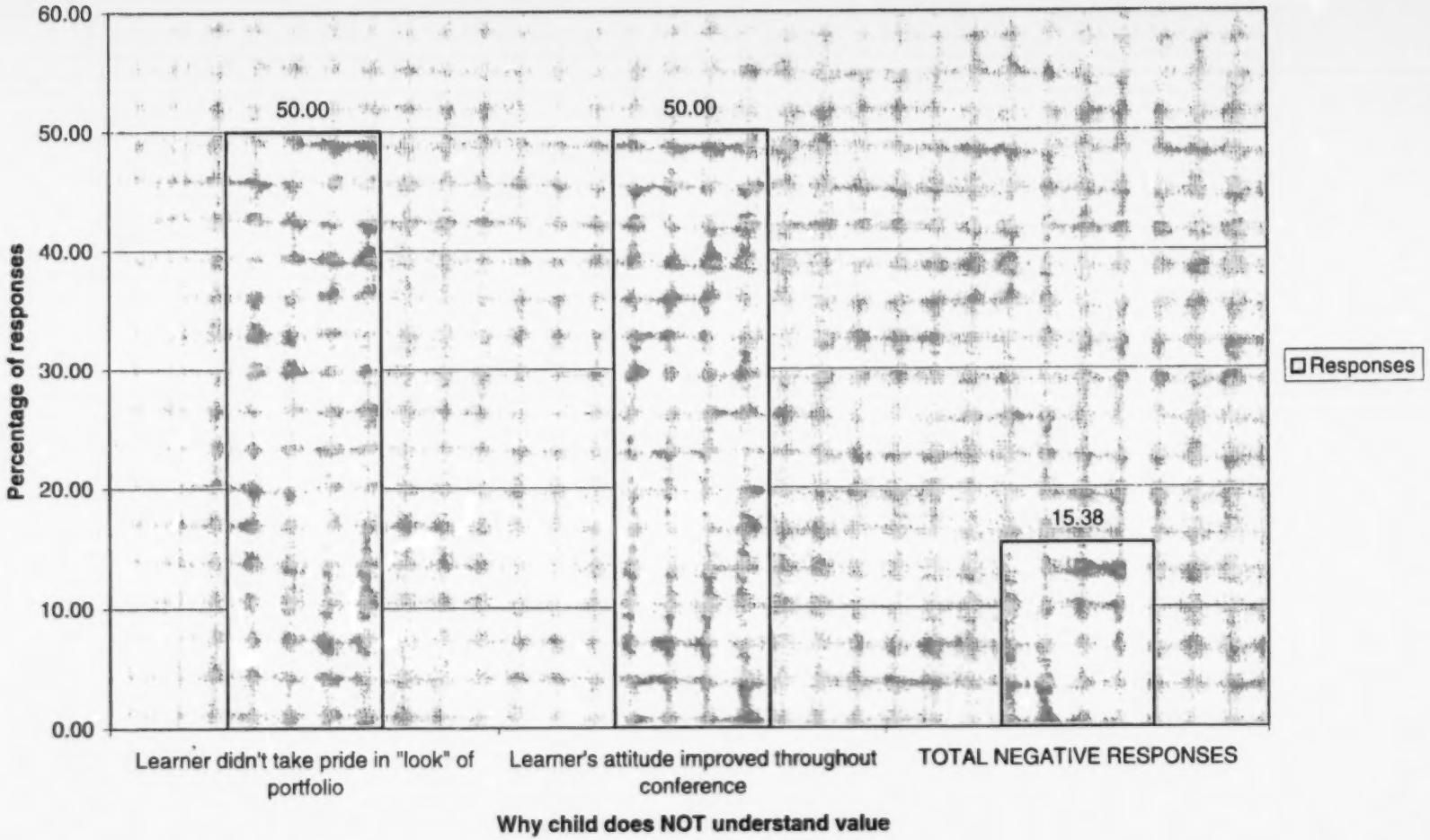
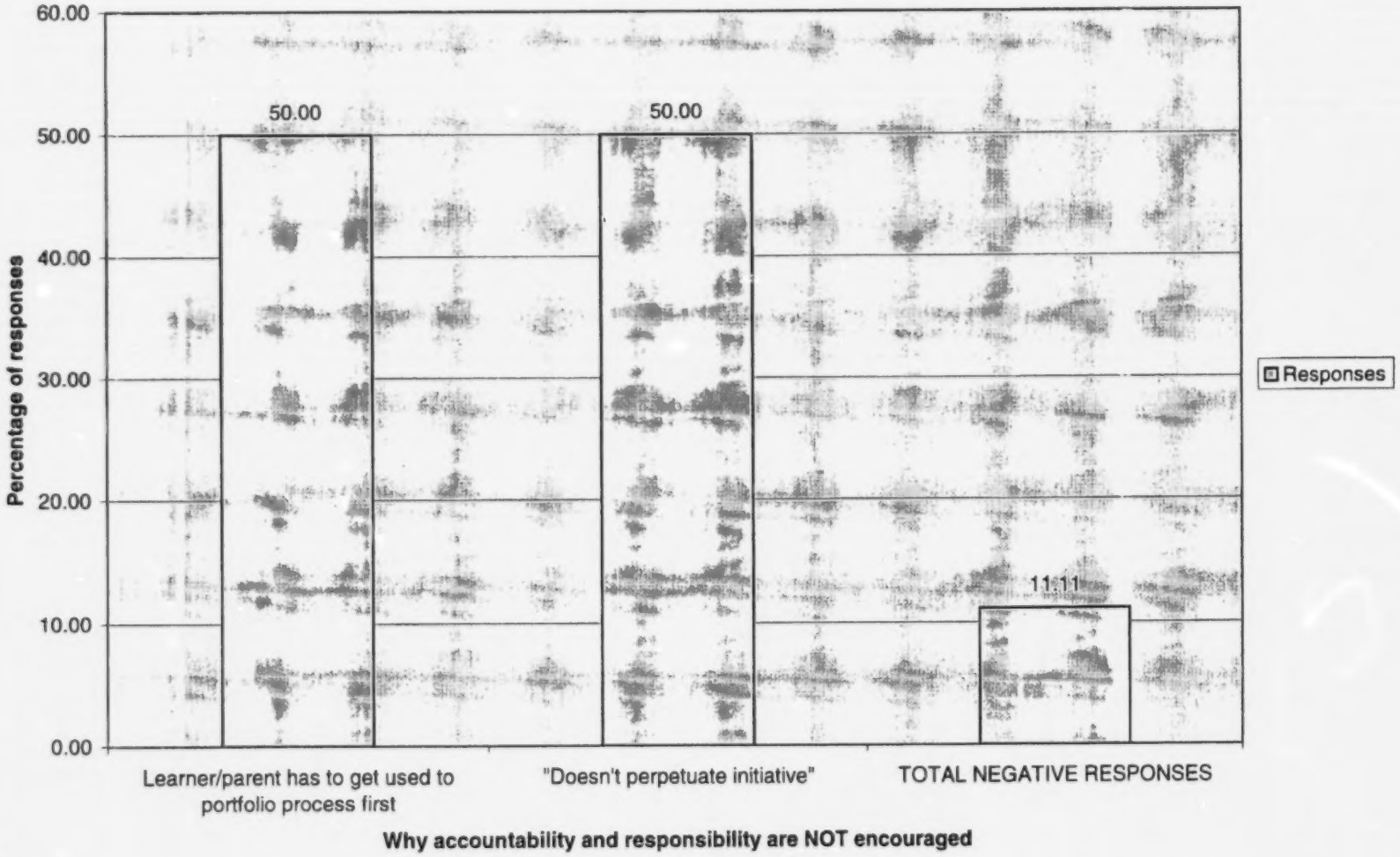
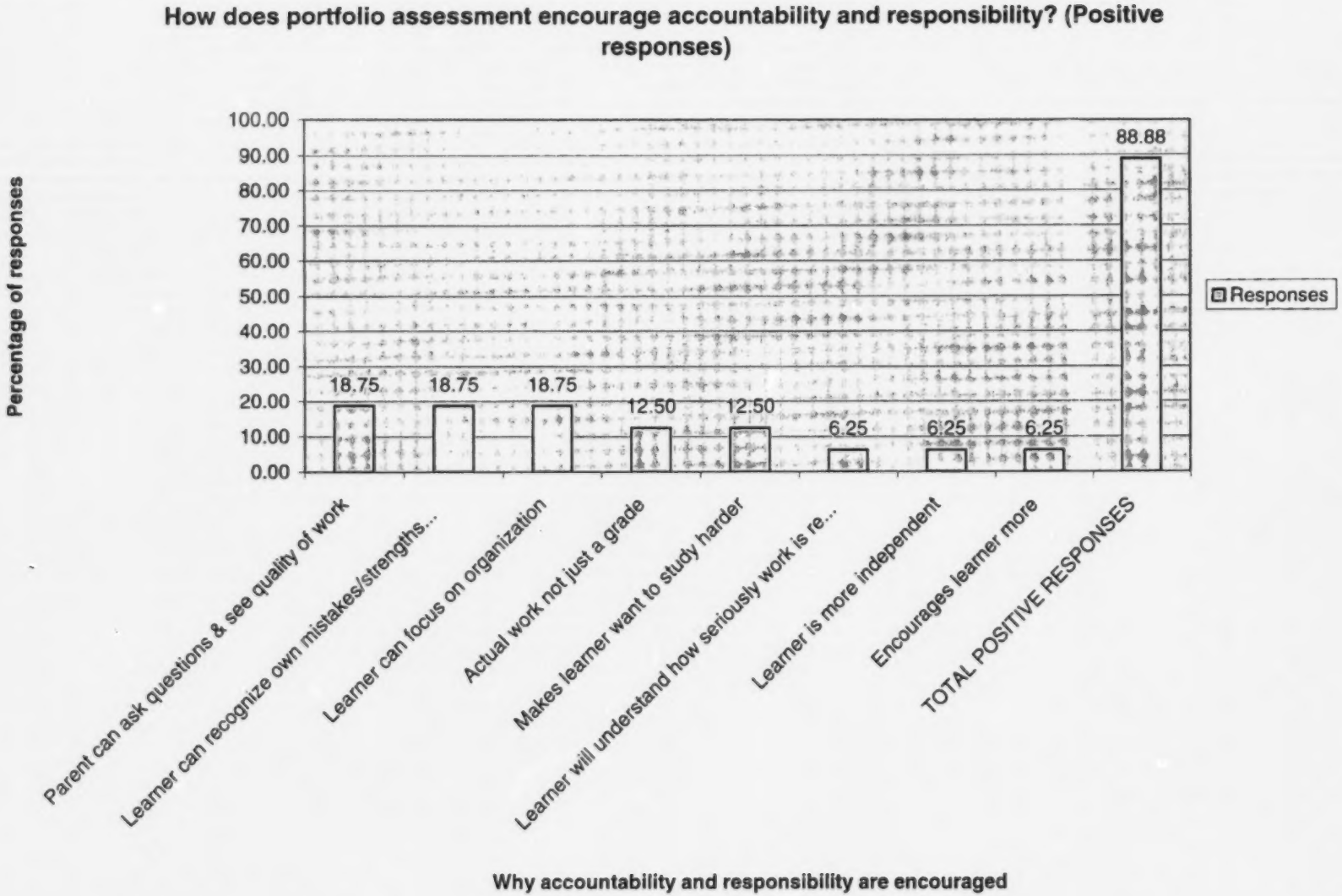
Why your child does NOT understand the value of the work that goes into his/her portfolio/reflective analysis



How does the portfolio encourage accountability and responsibility? (Negative responses)





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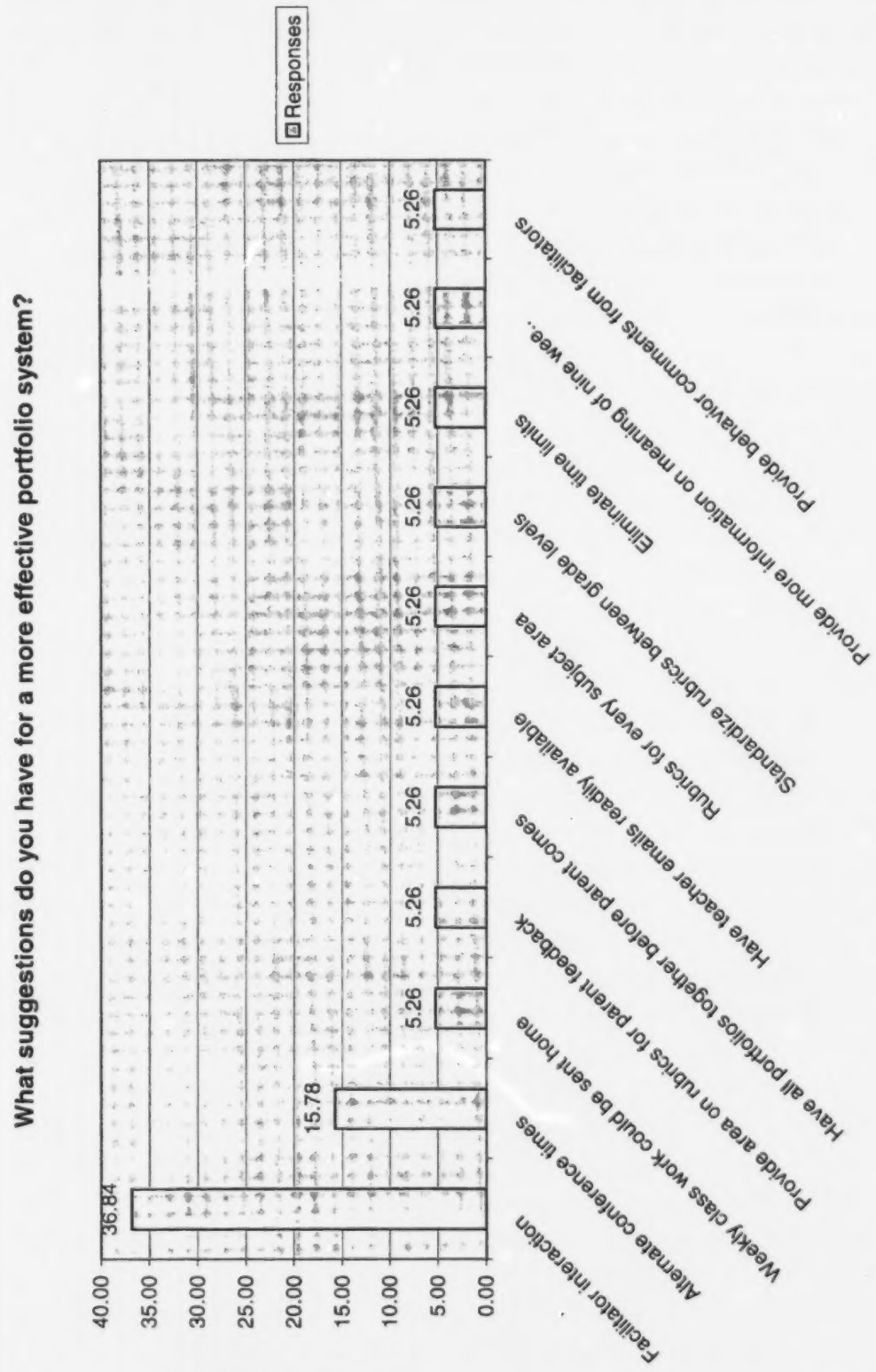
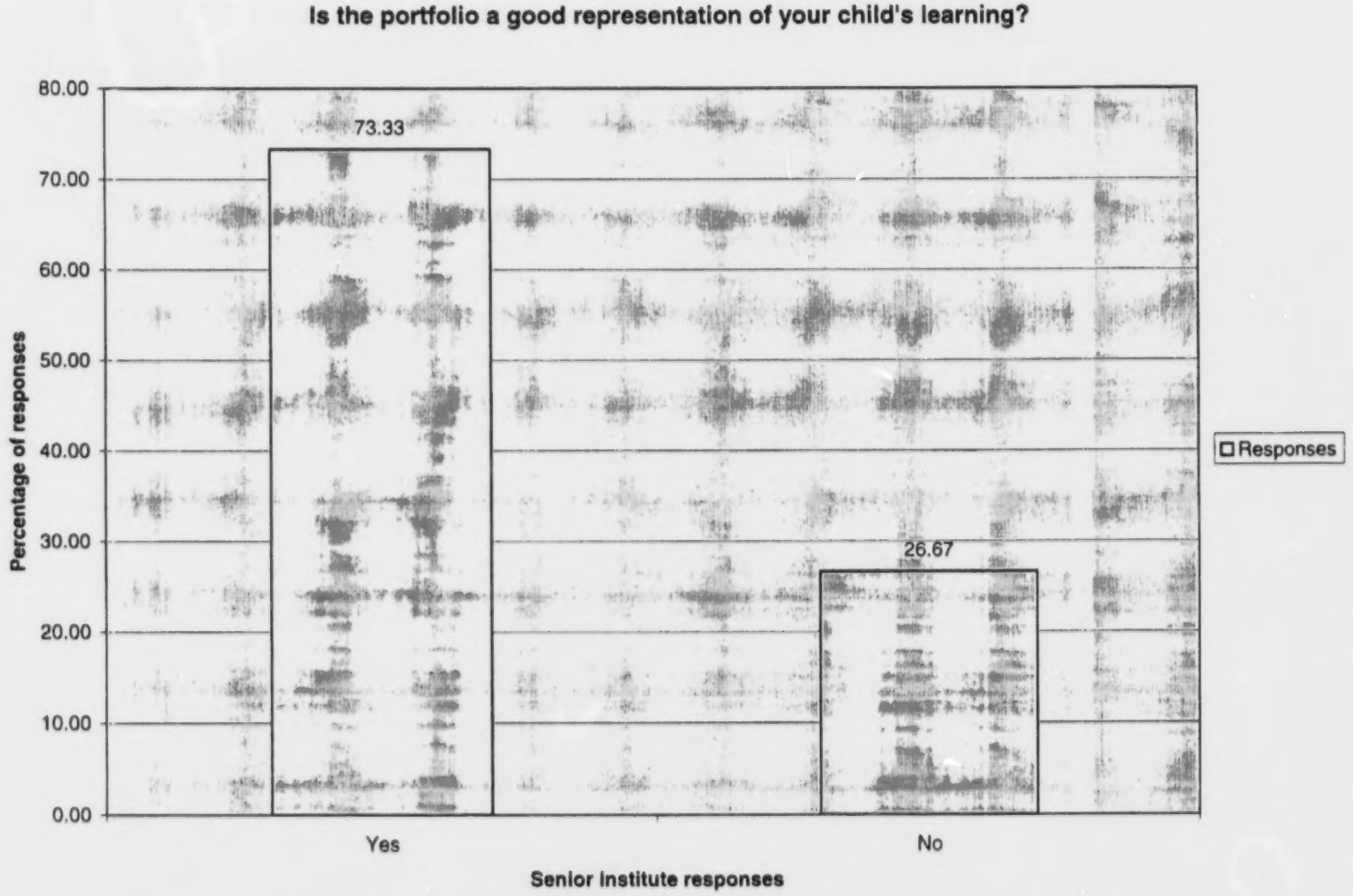
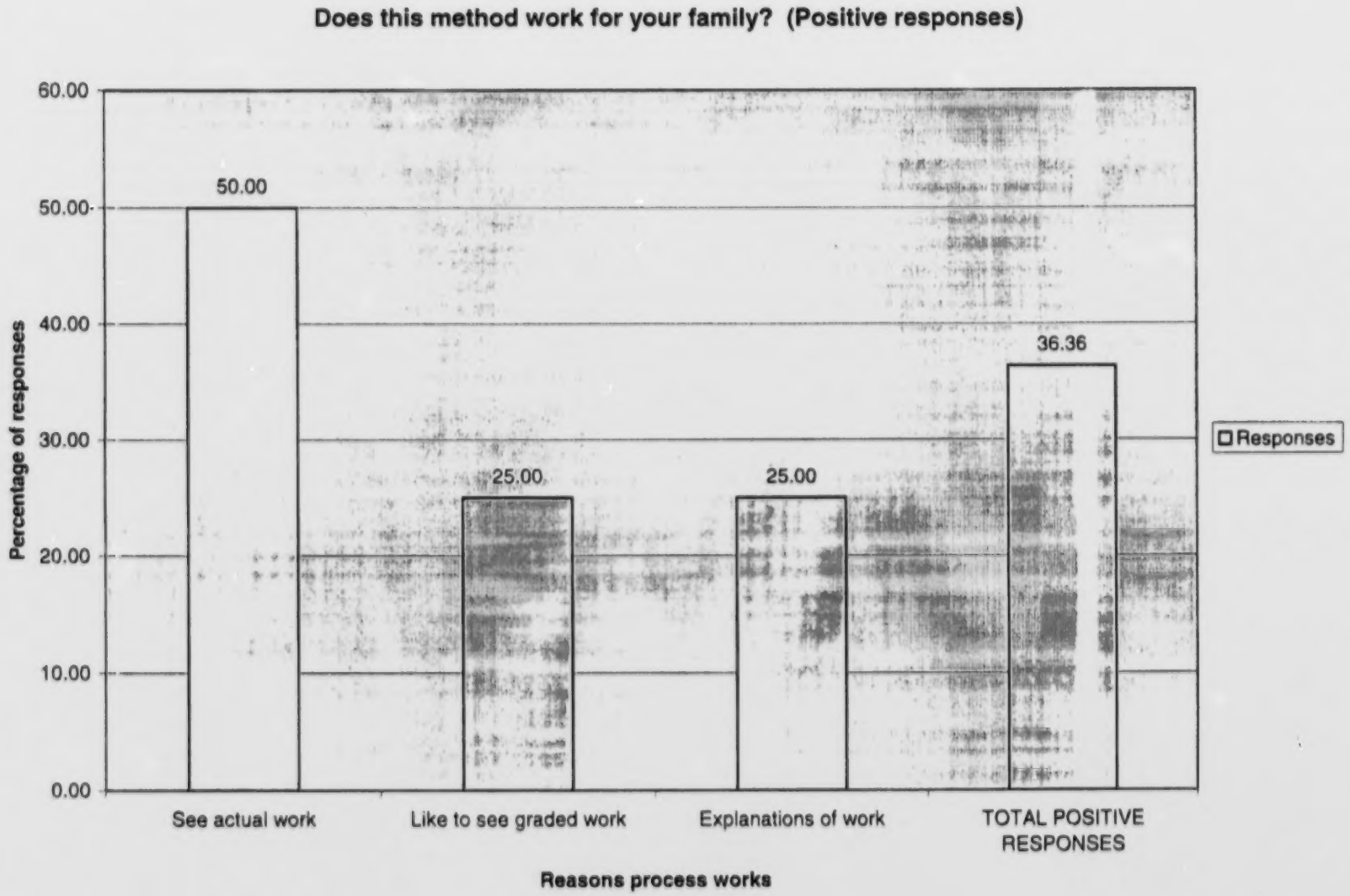
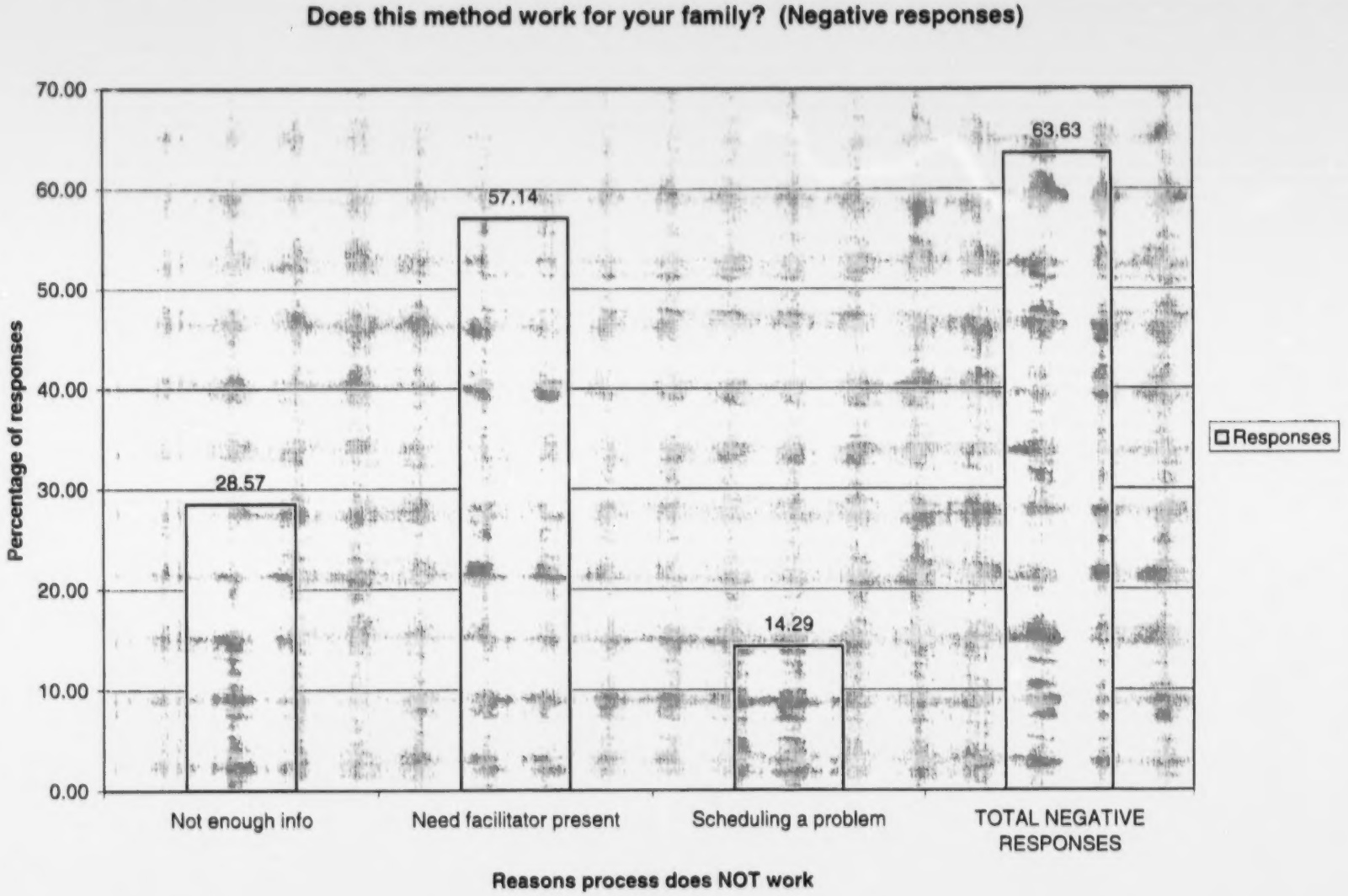
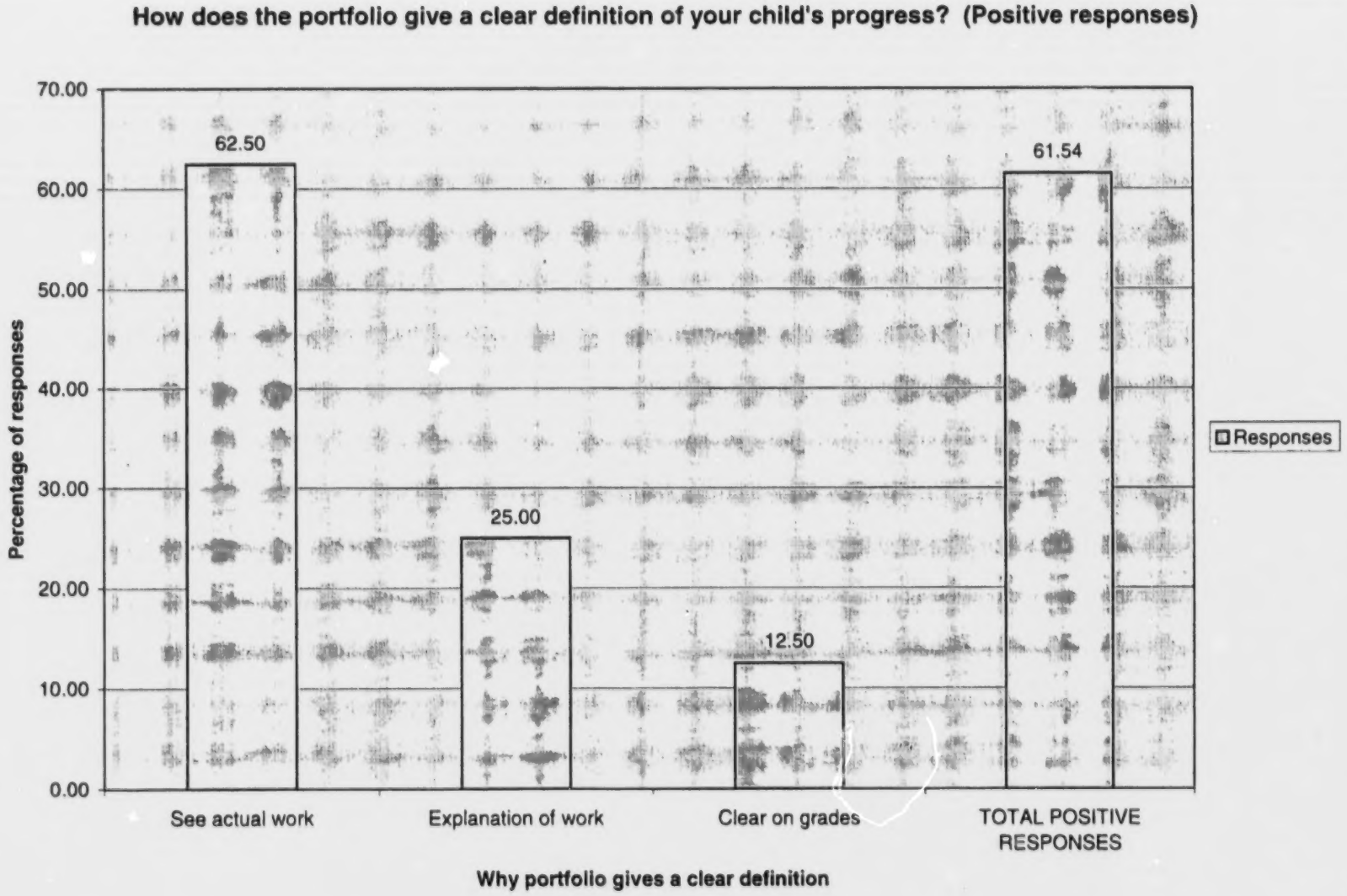

What suggestions do you have for a more effective portfolio system?
Responses
Percentage of responses
40.00
35.00
30.00
25.00
20.00
15.00
10.00
5.00
0.00
36.84
15.78
5.26
Facilitator interaction
Alternate conference times
Weekly class work could be sent home
Provide area on rubrics for parent feedback
Have all portfolios together before parent comes
Have teacher emails readily available
Rubrics for every subject area
Standardize rubrics between grade levels
Eliminate time limits
Provide more information on meaning of nine wee..
Provide behavior comments from facilitators
Suggestions

APPENDIX F

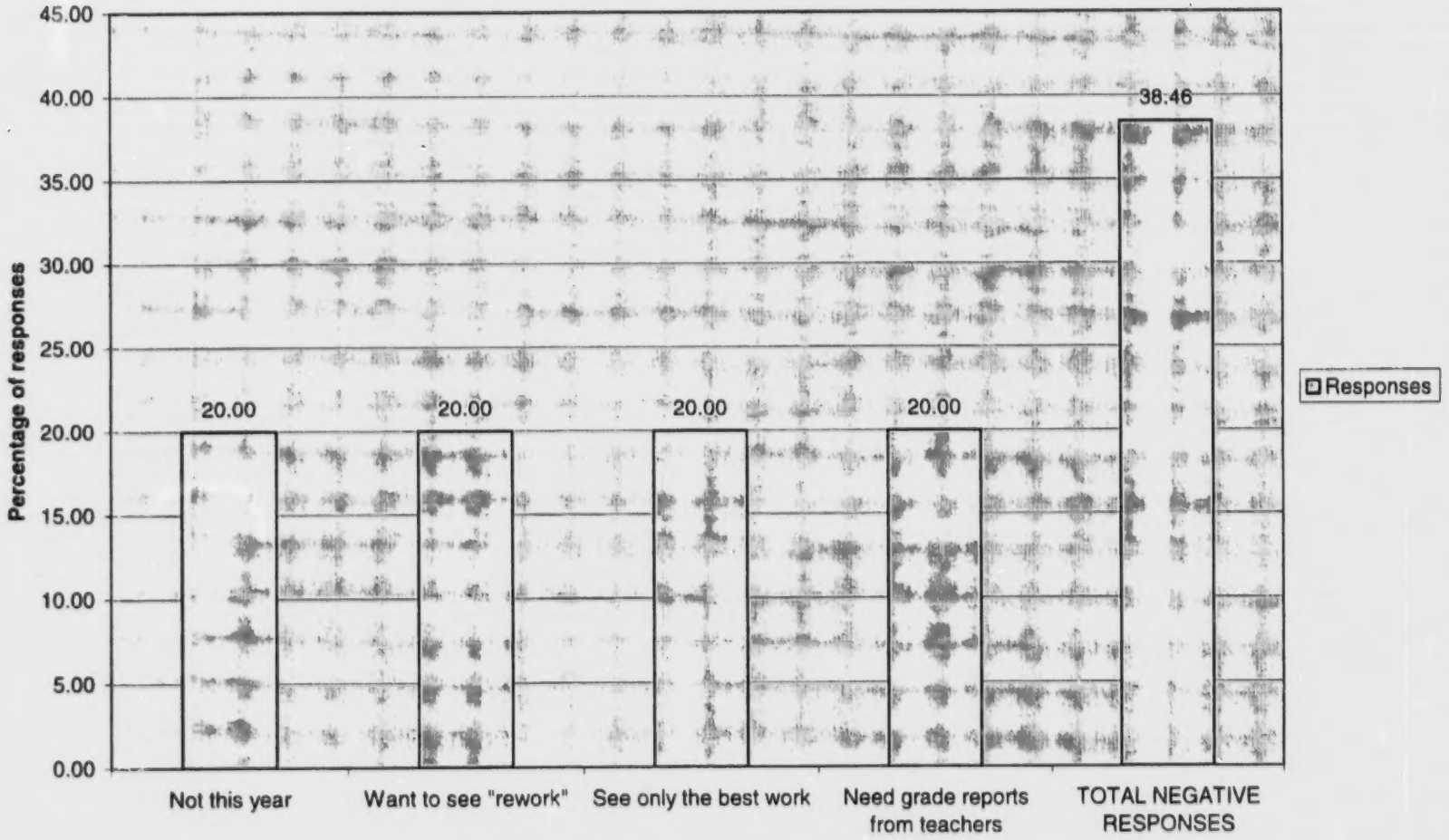

Is the portfolio a good representation of your child's learning?
80.00
70.00
60.00
50.00
40.00
30.00
20.00
10.00
0.00
Percentage of responses
73.33
26.67
Yes
No
Senior Institute responses
Responses


Does this method work for your family? (Positive responses)
60.00
50.00
40.00
30.00
20.00
10.00
0.00
Percentage of responses
50.00
25.00
25.00
36.36
Responses
See actual work
Like to see graded work
Explanations of work
TOTAL POSITIVE RESPONSES
Reasons process works


Does this method work for your family? (Negative responses)
70.00
60.00
50.00
40.00
30.00
20.00
10.00
0.00
Percentage of responses
28.57
57.14
14.29
63.63
Responses
Not enough info
Need facilitator present
Scheduling a problem
TOTAL NEGATIVE RESPONSES
Reasons process does NOT work

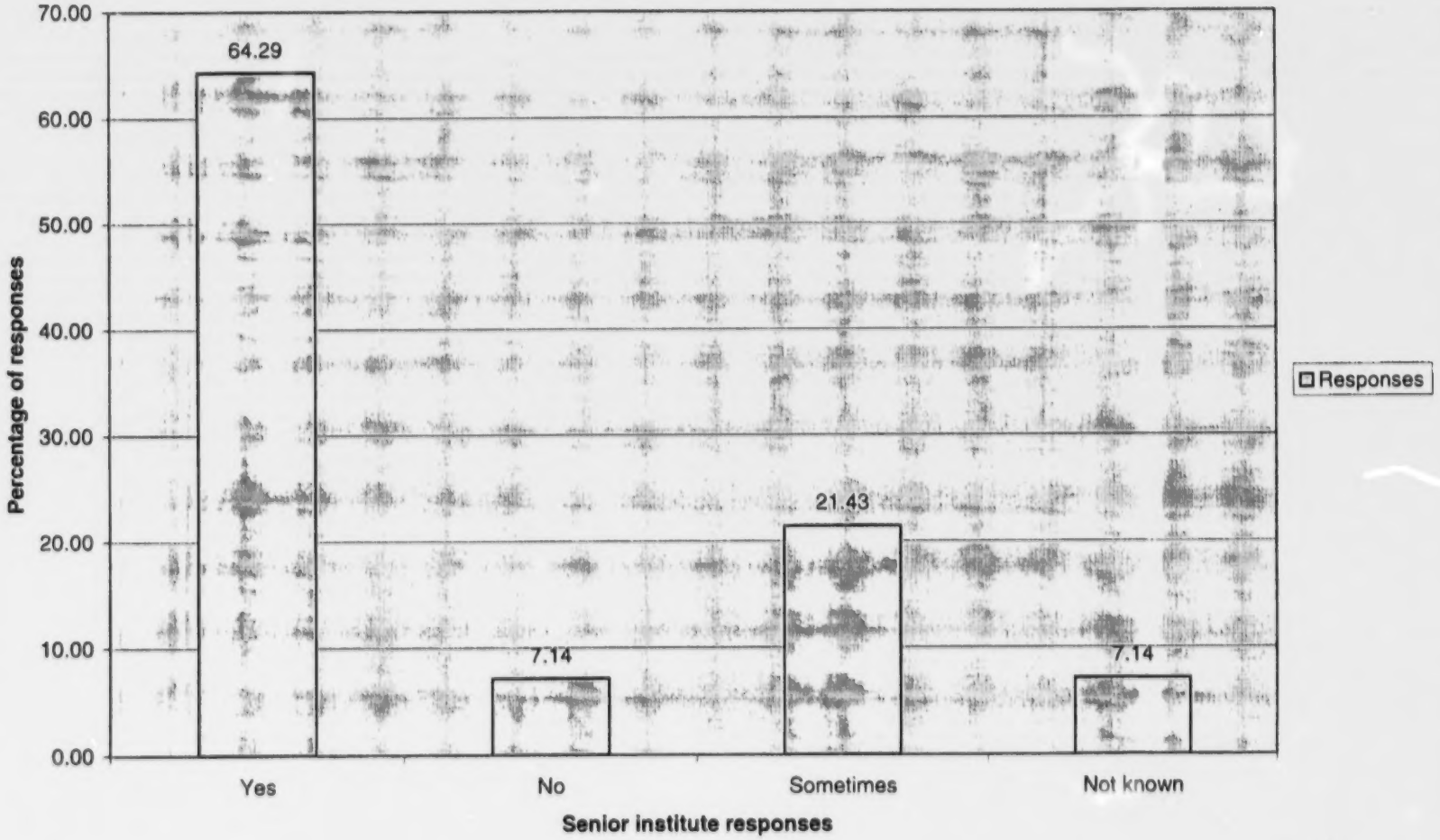

How does the portfolio give a clear definition of your child's progress? (Positive responses)
70.00
60.00
50.00
40.00
30.00
20.00
10.00
0.00
Percentage of responses
62.50
25.00
12.50
61.54
See actual work
Explanation of work
Clear on grades
TOTAL POSITIVE RESPONSES
Why portfolio gives a clear definition
Responses

How does the portfolio give a clear definition of your child's progress? (Negative responses)

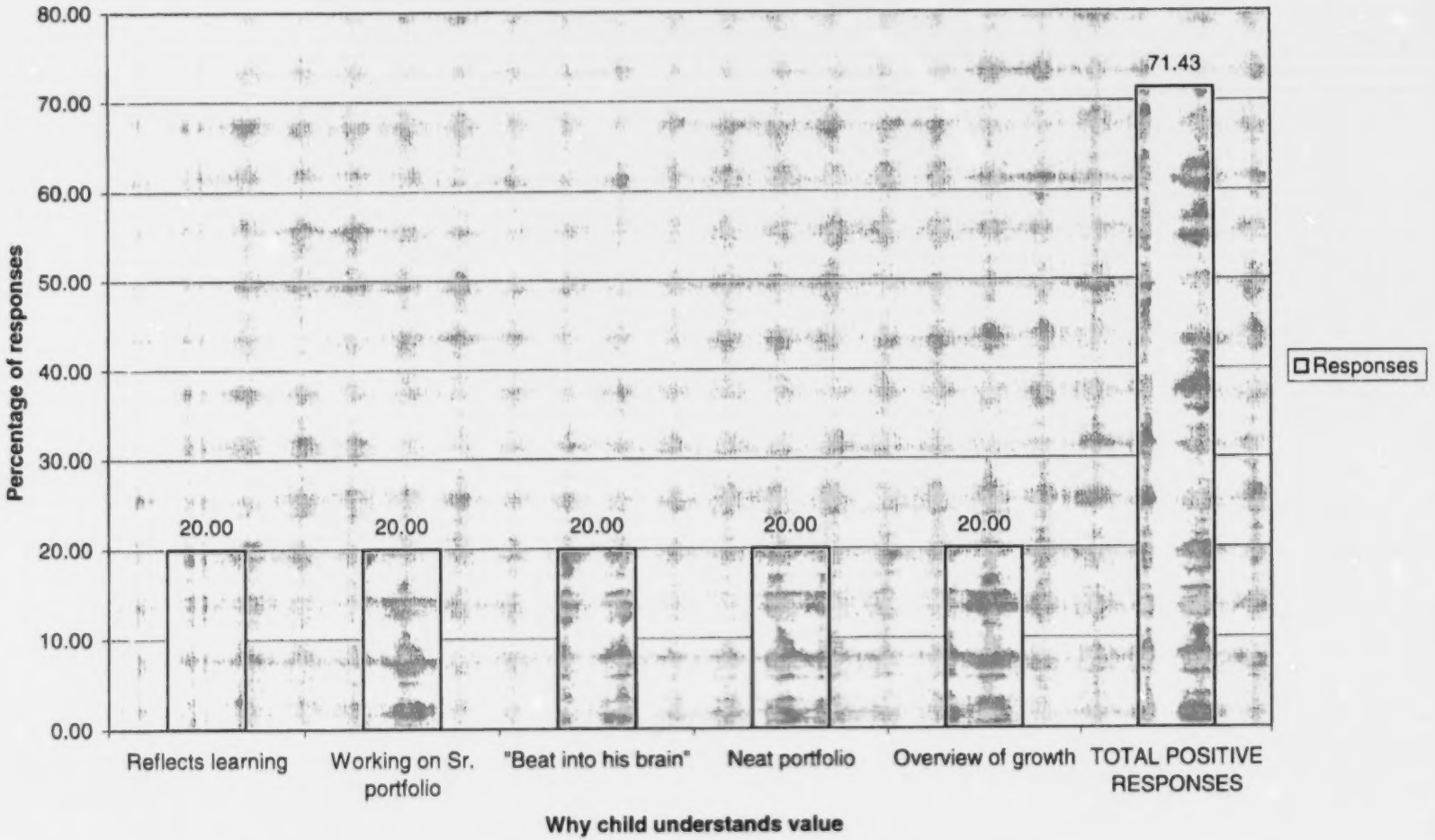


BEST COPY AVAILABLE

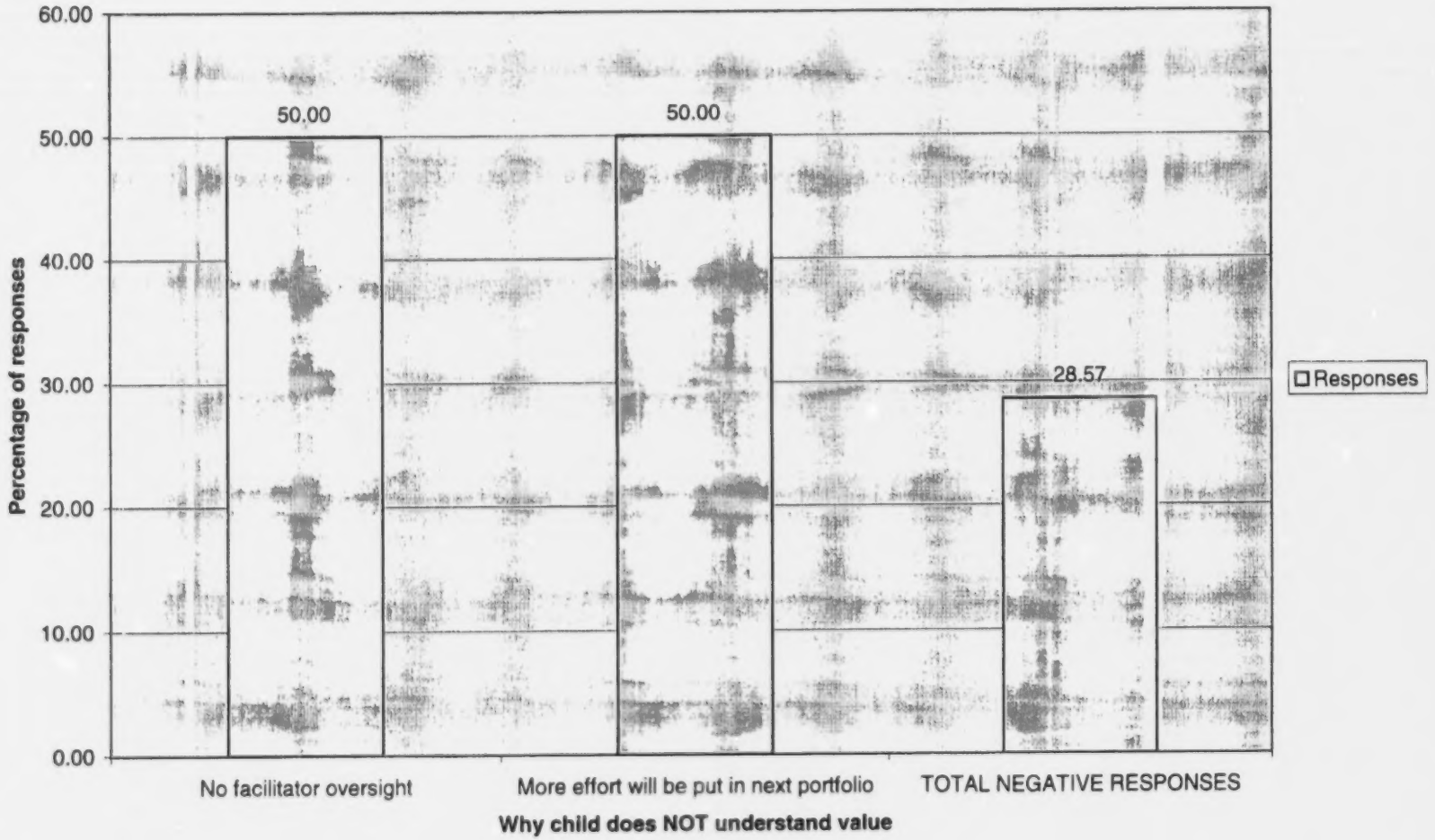
Does your child understand the value of the work that goes into his/her portfolio and of the reflective analysis?



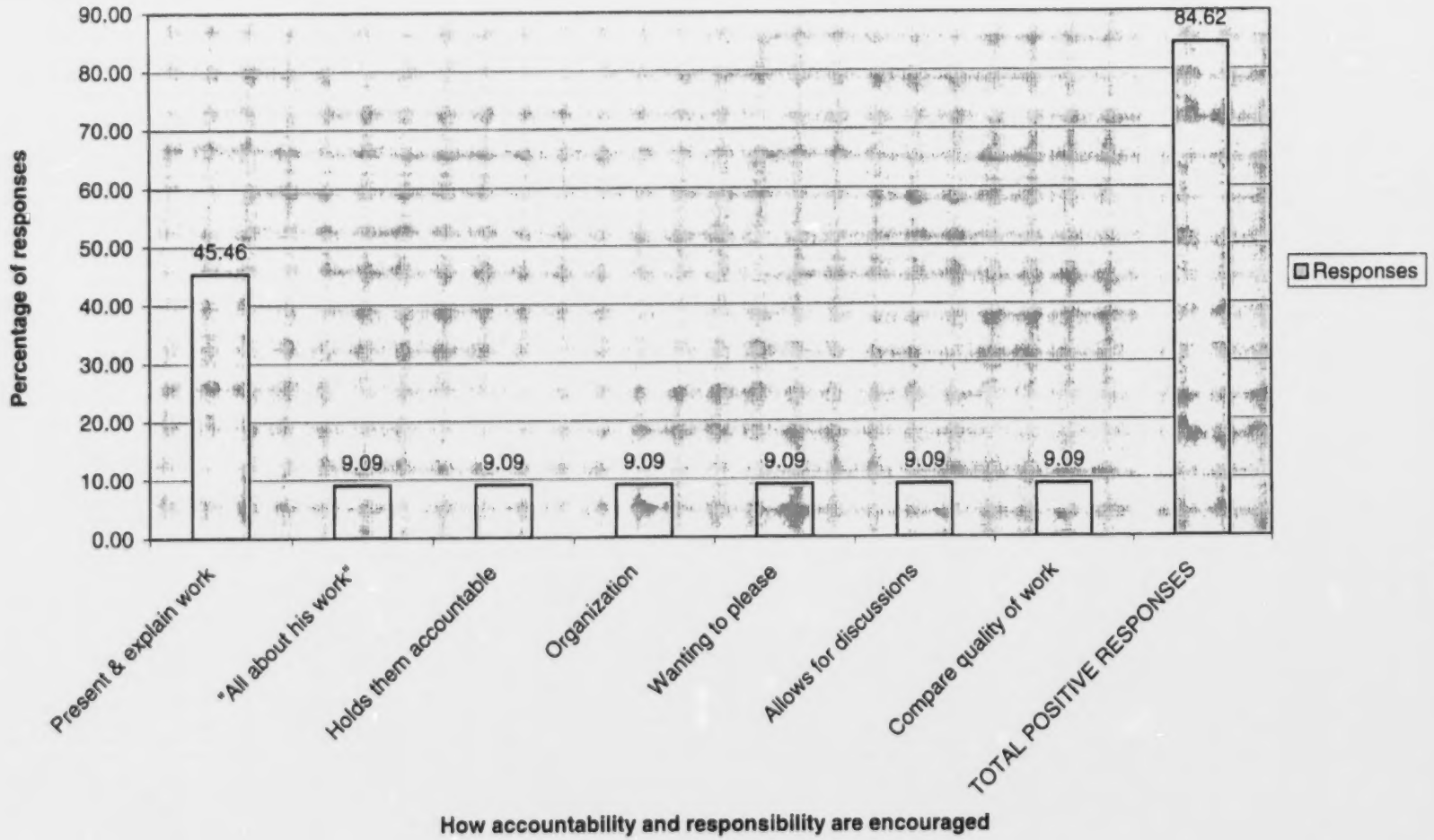
Why does your child understand the value of the work that goes into his/her portfolio and of the reflective analysis?



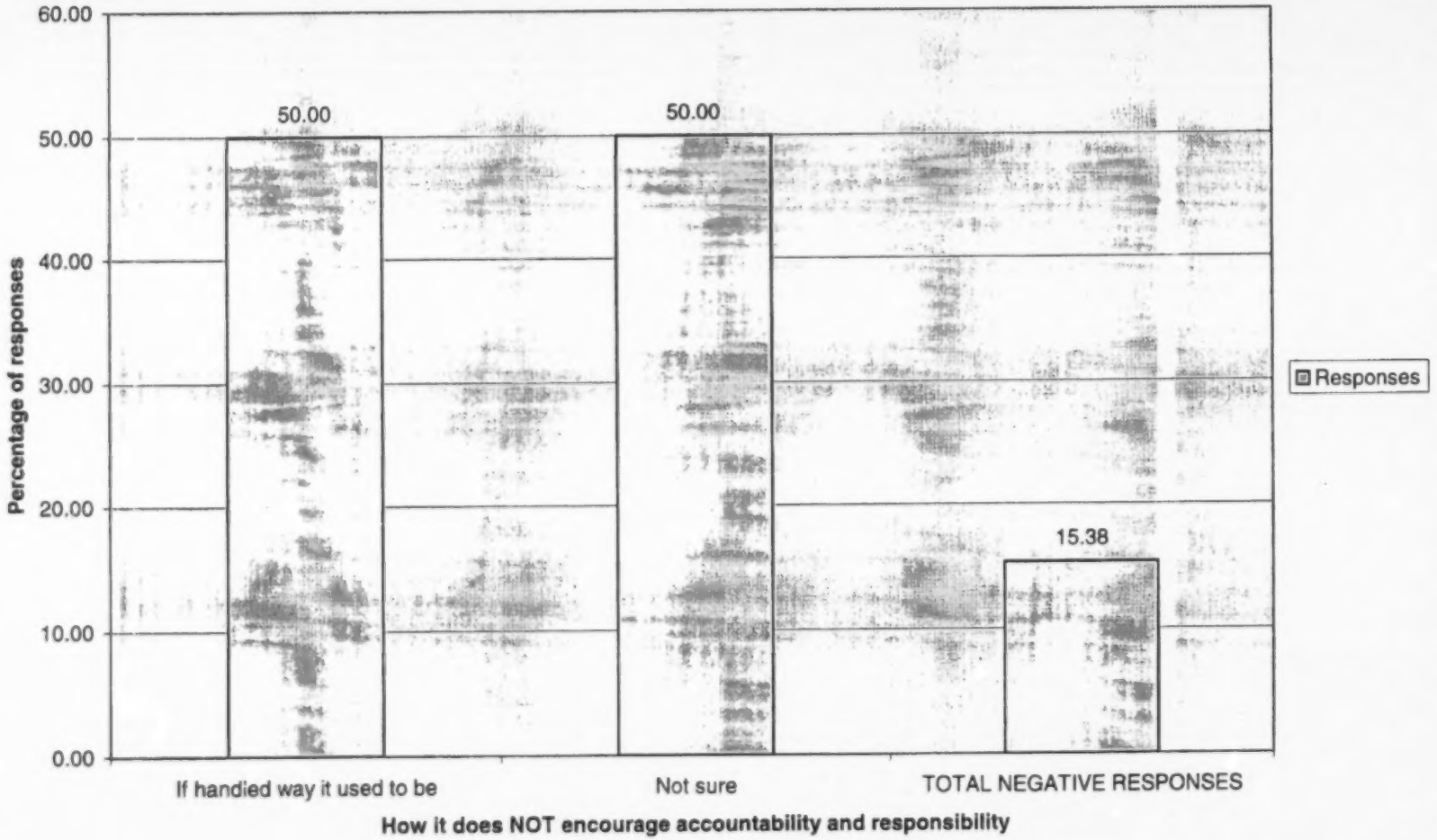
Why your child does NOT understand the value of the work that goes into his/her portfolio/reflective analysis?



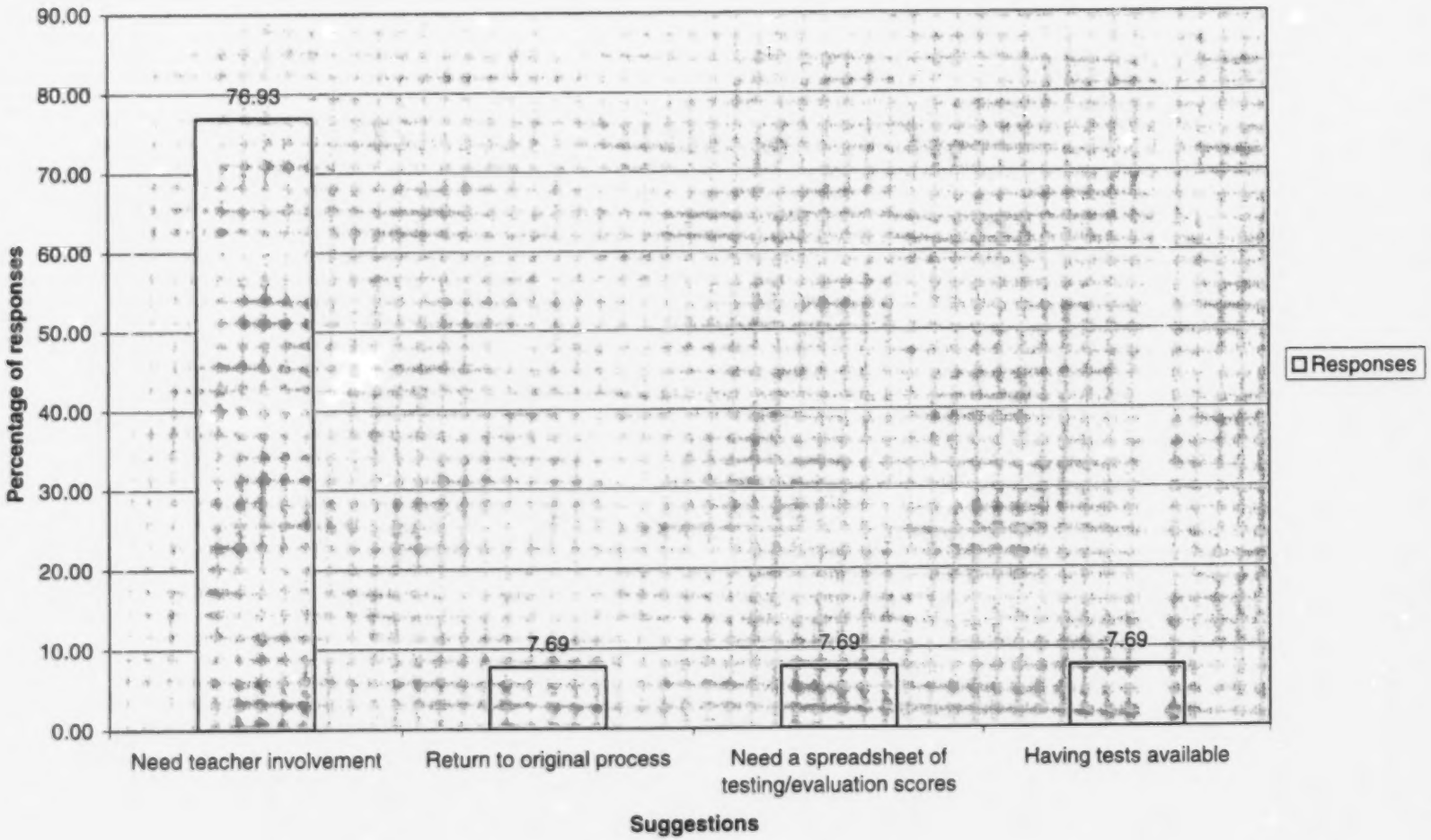
How does the portfolio assessment encourage learner accountability and responsibility? (Positive responses)



How does portfolio assessment encourage learner accountability and responsibility?
(Negative responses)

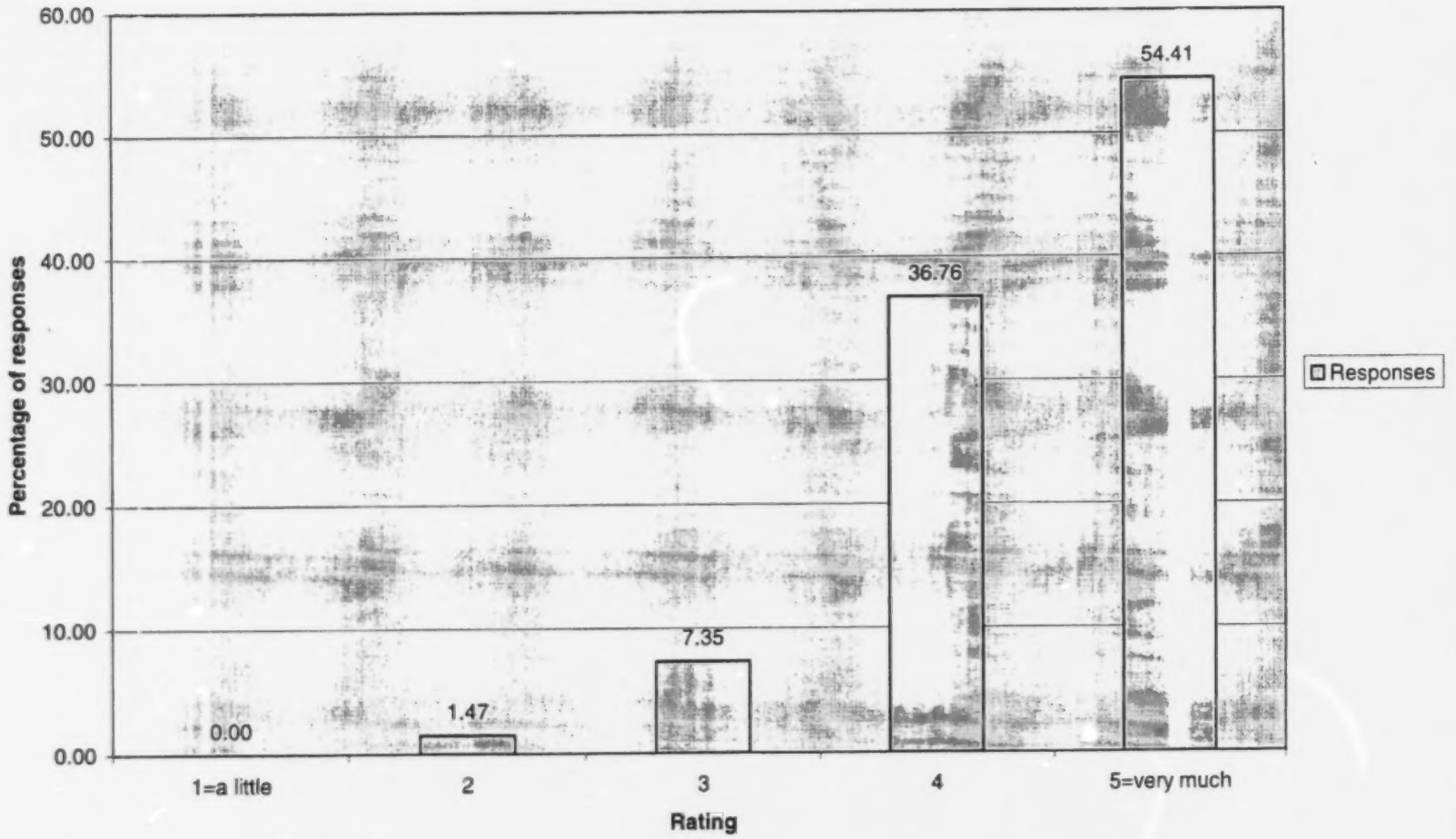


In this transition process, what suggestions do you have for a more effective portfolio system?

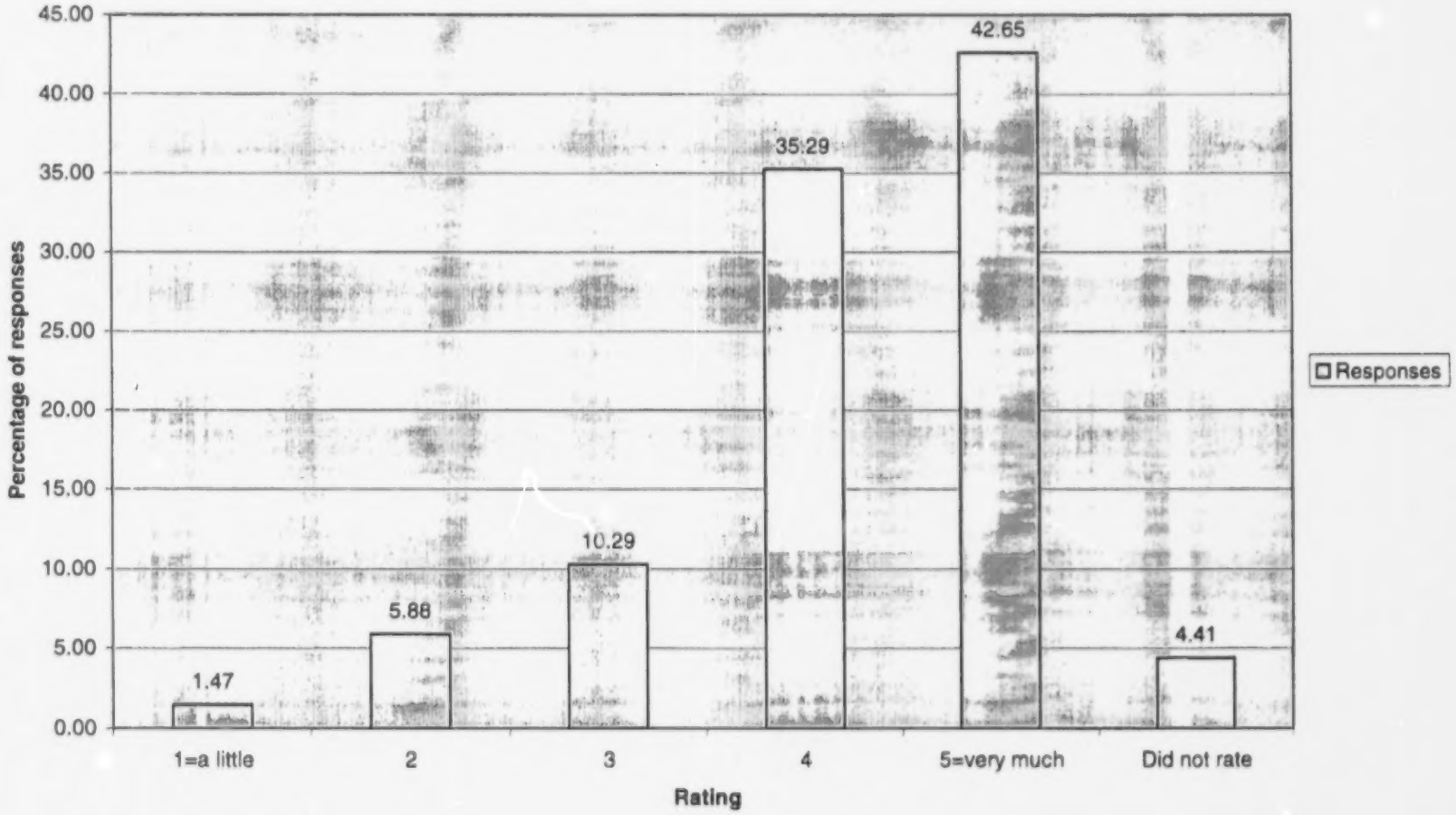


APPENDIX G

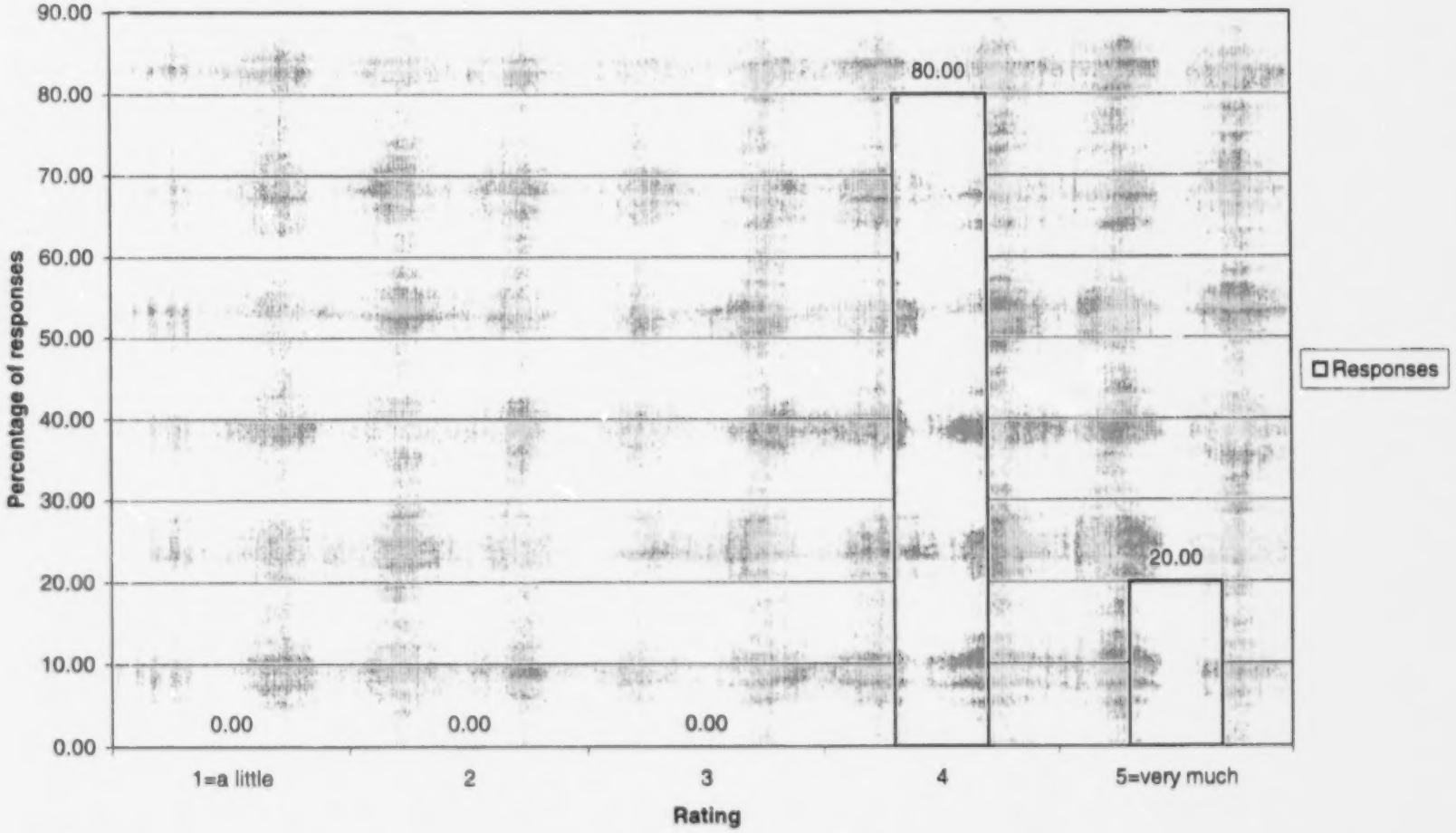
Rate how much you learned about your child from the portfolio session
(Elementary school: January, 2002)



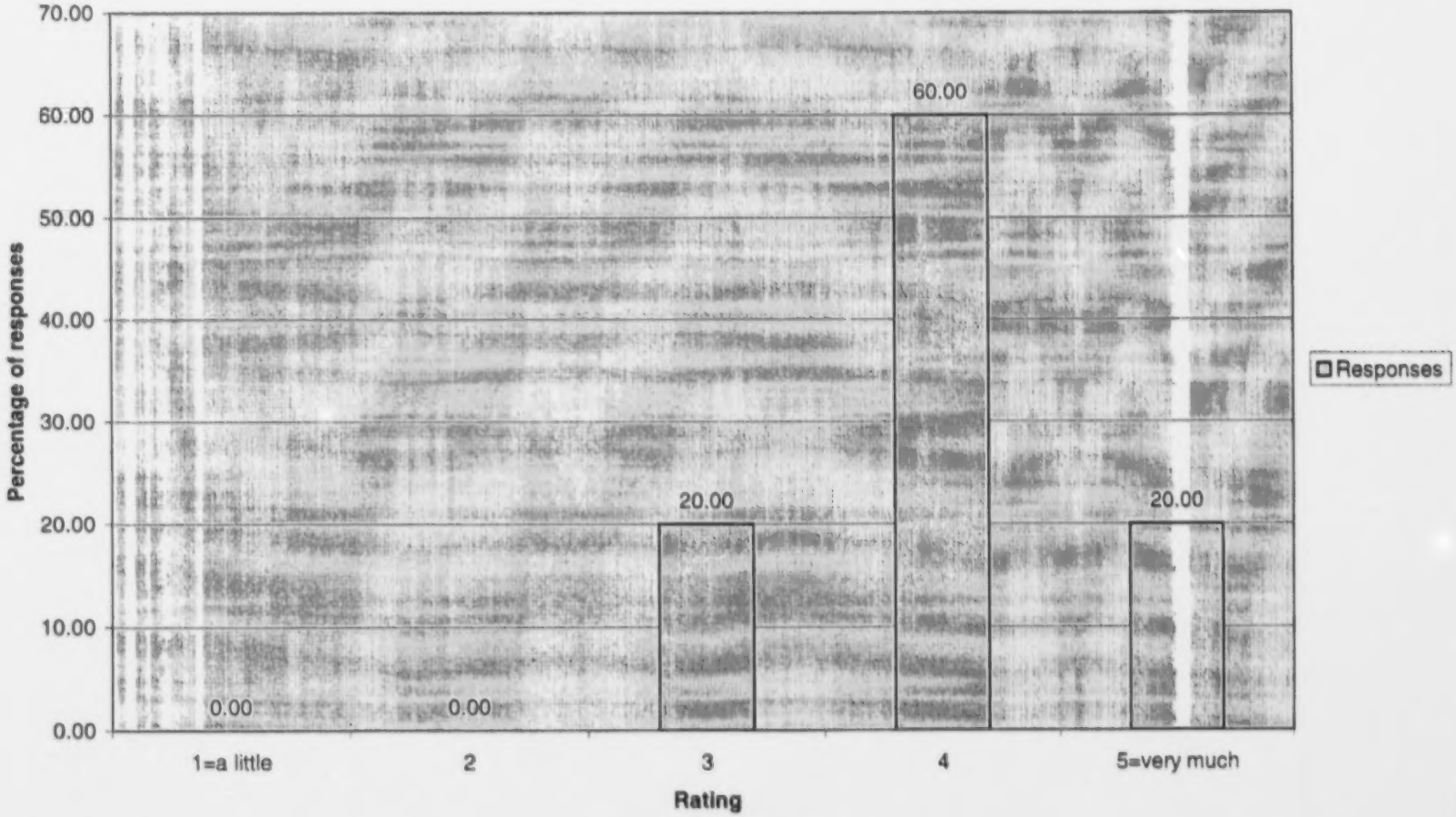
Rate how much the rubric assessment attached to the learner's work helped you understand the current performance of your child (Elementary school: January, 2002)



Rate how much you learned about your child from the portfolio session
(Middle school: January, 2002)



Rate how much the rubric assessment attached to the learner's work helped you understand the current performance of your child
(Middle school: January, 2002)



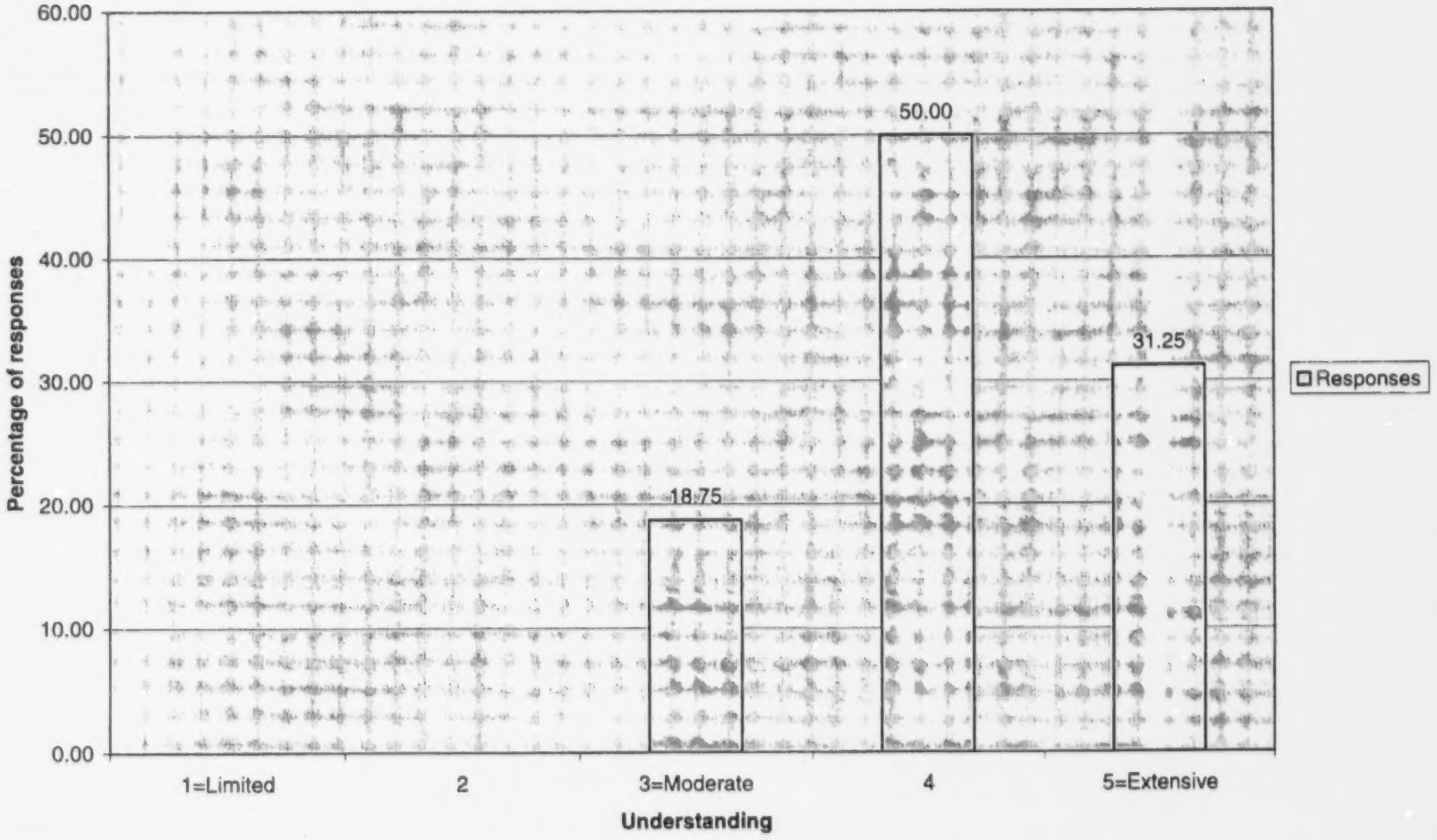
Suggestions from the 2001/2002 Parent Reflections (Elementary & Middle Schools)

All suggestions were made by one parent, unless otherwise indicated.

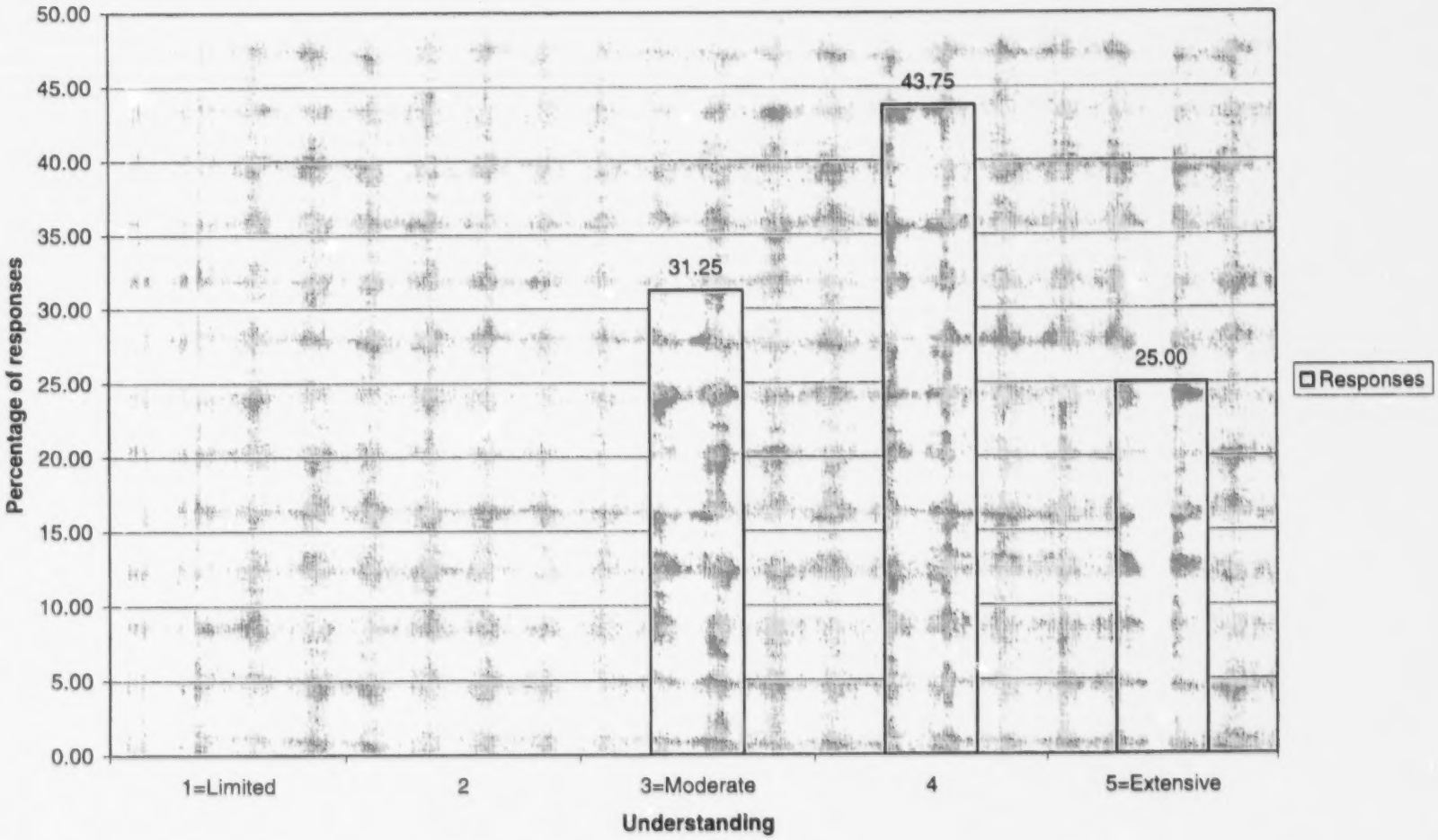
Refreshments
Review what an average day is like
Color code dividers
Do reflective analysis on Power Point
Offer conference times after 6 PM
Consolidate work more
Put rubrics in page order
Input from the special education facilitator
More privacy during the conference
See work that was done at school not at home
See more work done on Power Point
Separate work from 3rd nine weeks from 2nd nine weeks
More explanation of the rubrics (2)
More facilitator input (2)
Worrisome to see uncorrected work (2)
Would like to see learner be more familiar with the work (2)
Put portfolio in order (2)
More daily feedback or work sent home (3)

APPENDIX I

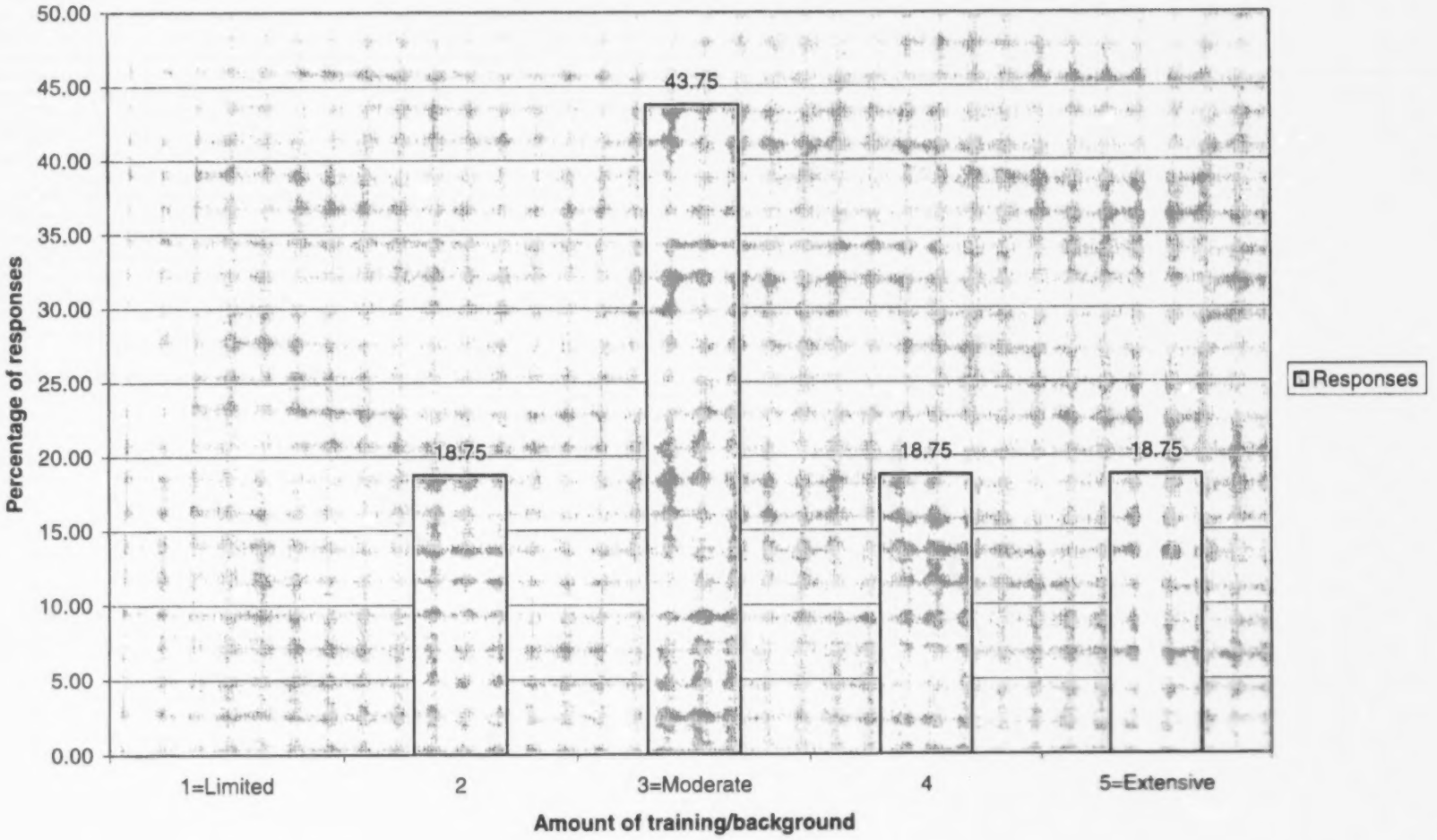
How would you describe your understanding of the current portfolio process at ACT Academy?



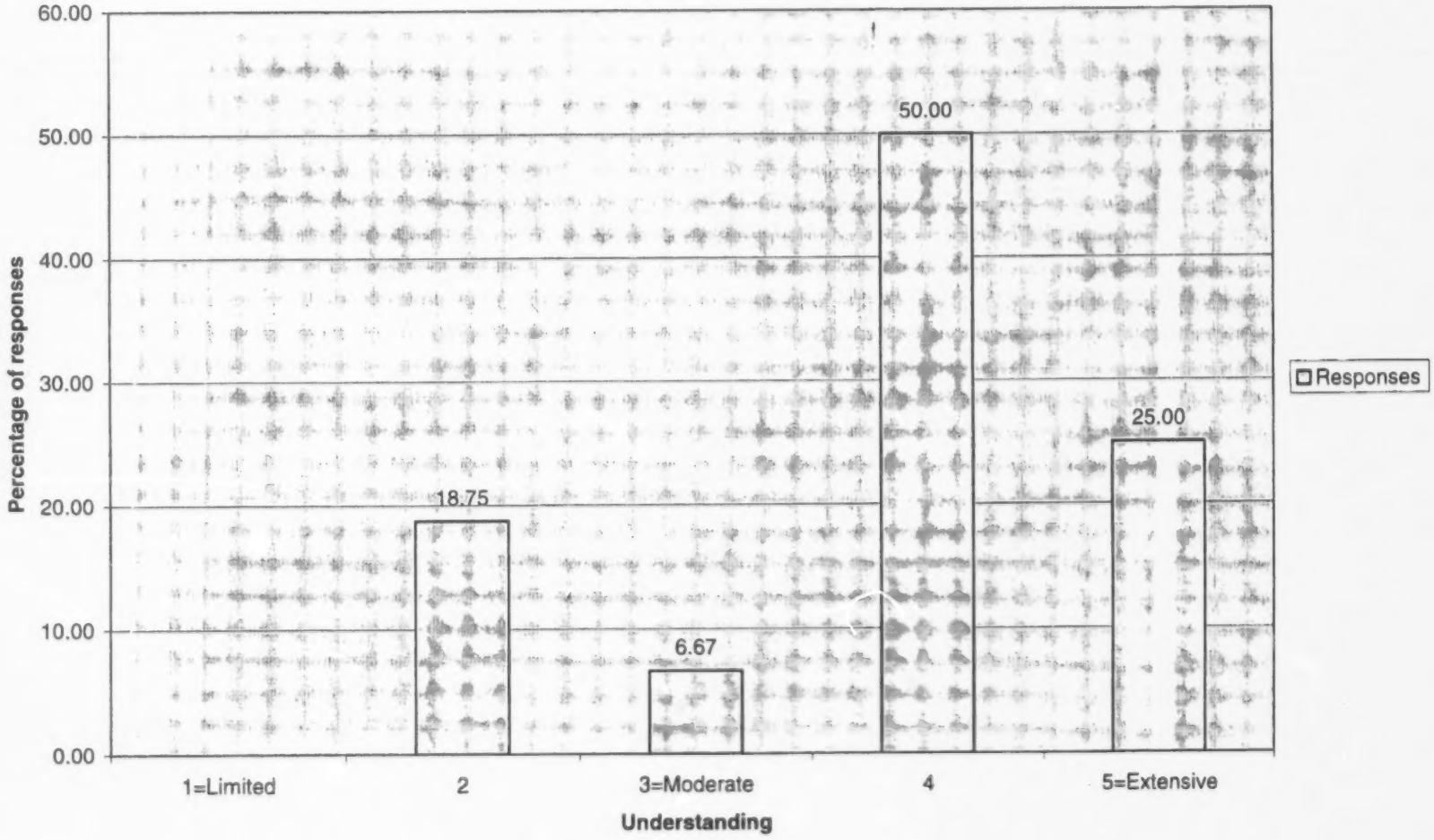
How would you describe your understanding of the reflective analysis process at ACT Academy?



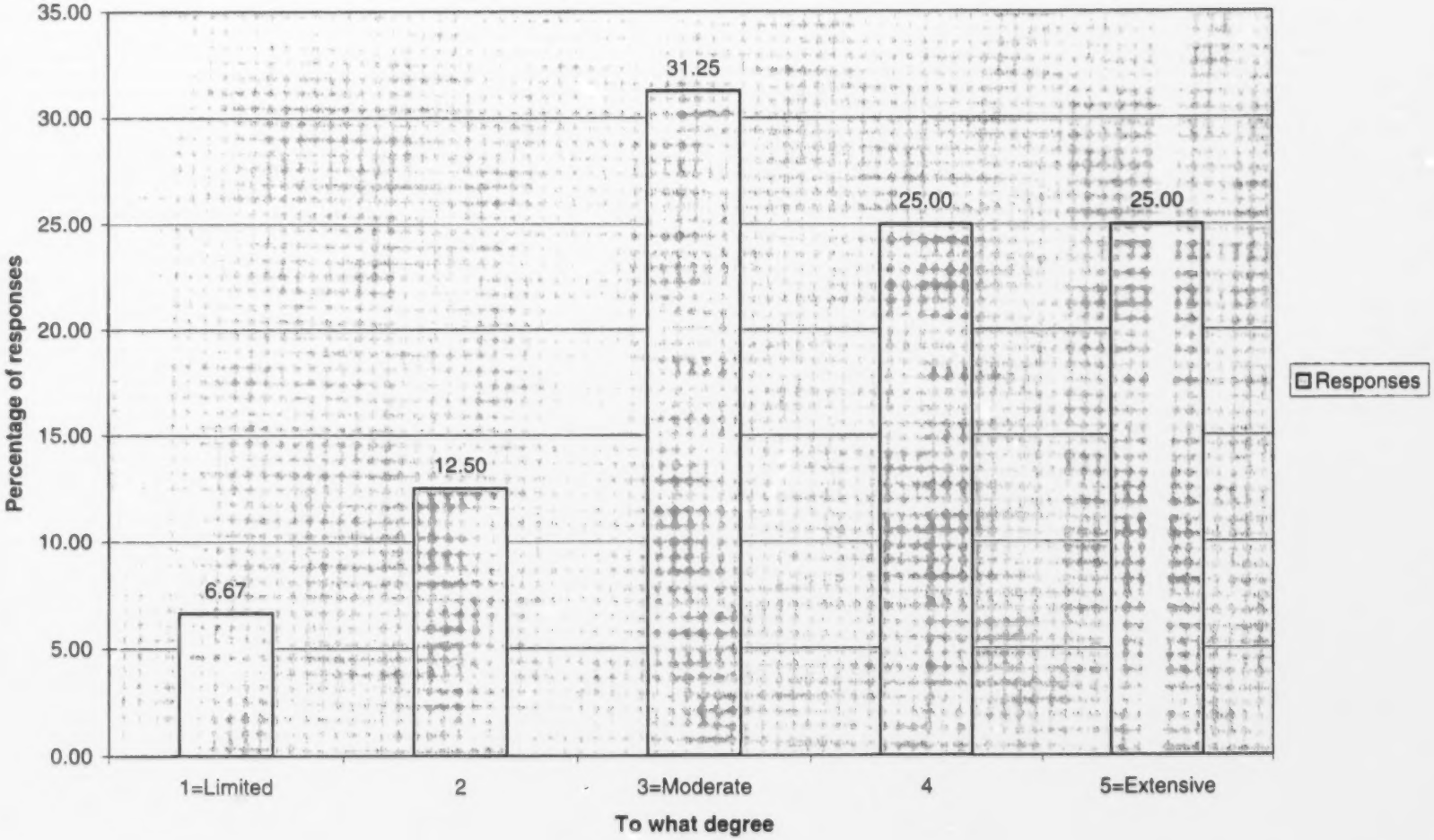
How would you describe the amount of training/background you have in portfolio assessment?



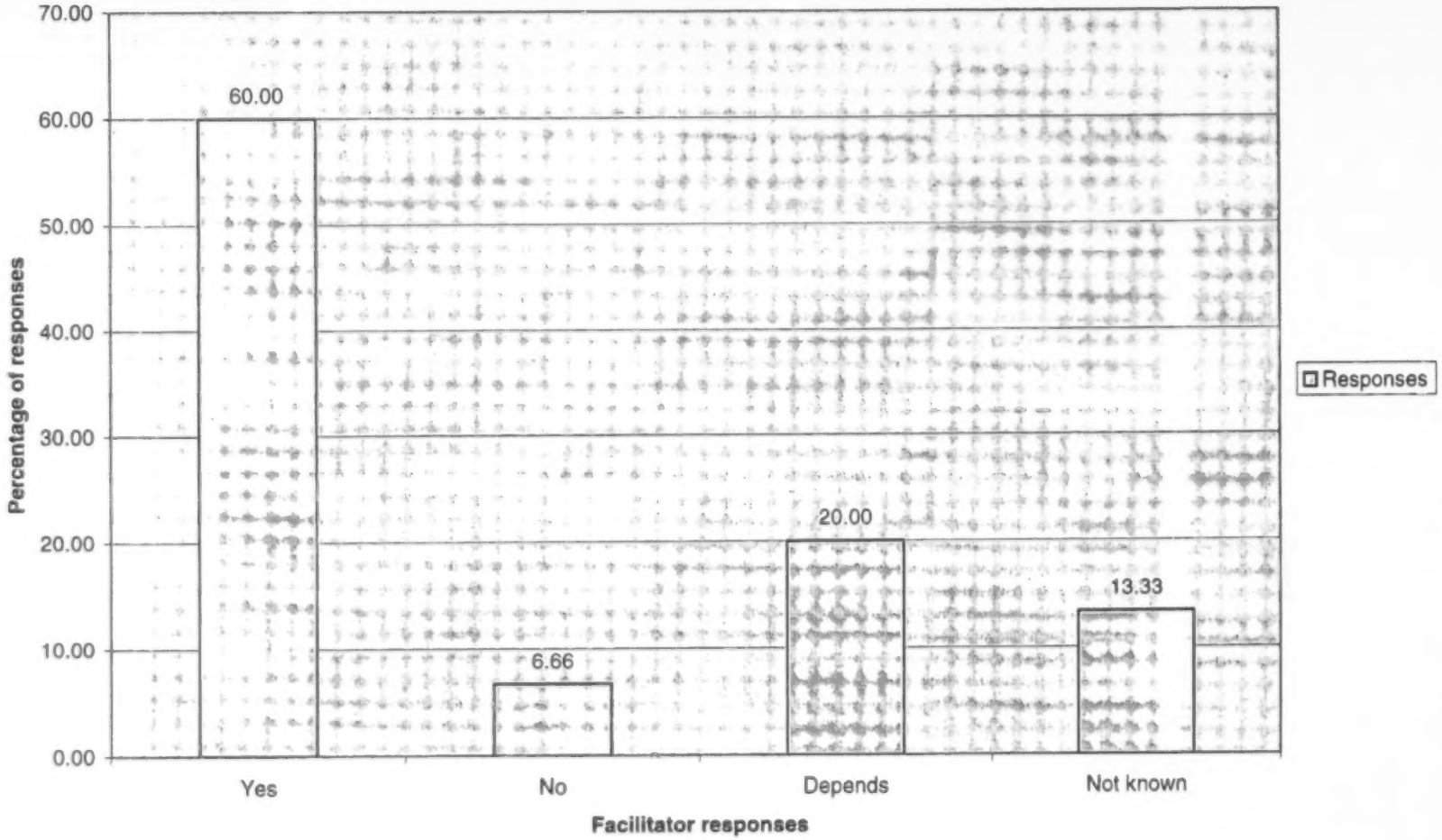
How would you describe the understanding you have of your learners' academic needs as a result of the portfolio process?



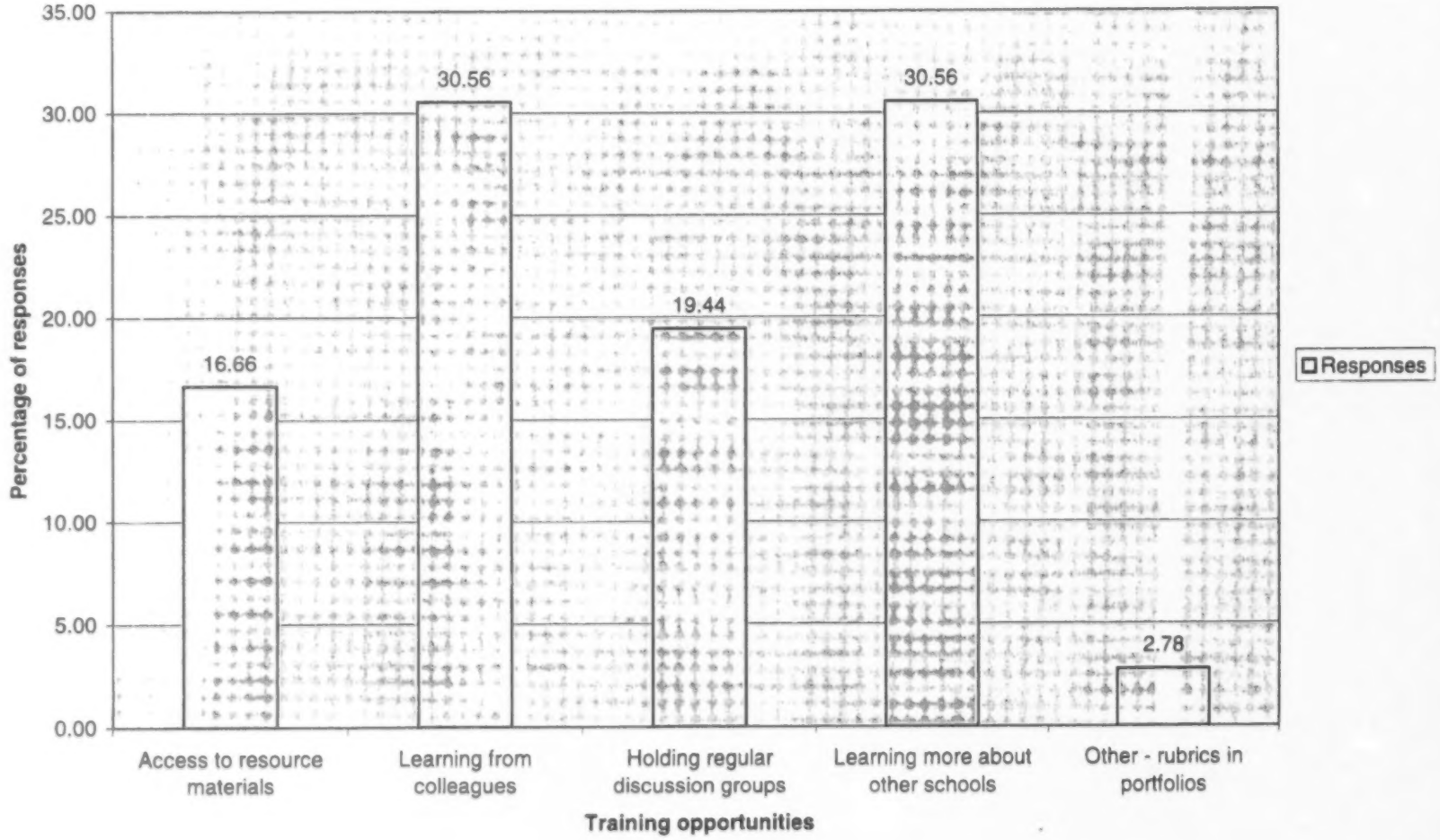
To what degree, does the information you glean from your learners' portfolios influence your future instruction?



Do you feel that facilitators should be present to interact with parents/learners during conferences?



Which training opportunities do you feel would benefit your understanding of portfolio assessment?



Components of Proposed Parent Handbook on Portfolio Assessment

1. Information about the purpose and benefits of portfolio assessment
2. History of portfolio assessment at ACT Academy
3. Portfolio conference expectations at ACT Academy
4. How portfolio conferences are structured and organized at ACT Academy
5. Purpose and benefits of reflective analysis
6. Purpose and benefits of rubric assessments
7. Suggestions on how to facilitate a successful portfolio conference with your child
8. Annotated bibliography on recommended portfolio assessment resources

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Organization/Address: Texas Woman's University, P.O. Box 425769, Educ. Administration, T. Educ. Dept., Denton, TX 76204-5769 College of Prof. Educ.	Telephone: (940) 898-2246 FAX: (940) 898-2209
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